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# WAGNER

## Tannhäuser

Pristine  
XR

### REVIEW: MELCHIOR IN ROLE OF TANNHAEUSER

It is many years since Wagner's "Tannhaeuser" enjoyed a performance comparable in excellence to that accorded the work at its initial presentation of the season, yesterday afternoon, at the Metropolitan Opera House. One or another of the roles has been sung as capably on occasion, but at no other time in the recent annals of the institution have all of the participants reached so high a level of accomplishment in this opera, or has the spirit of the masterpiece been so completely grasped.

Every singer of the strong cast happened to be in exceptionally fine vocal form, and the orchestra, under Erich Leinsdorf, provided a support worthy of the expert achievements of those on stage. For a number of seasons "Tannhaeuser" has been the weakest of the Metropolitan's Wagnerian productions. It has limped and dragged and been bereft of life or cohesion. Yesterday all this was changed. The performance moved smoothly and impressively from the start. It was filled with significant drama, and possessed real mood and atmosphere.

As a rule the first act has been particularly unsatisfactory as a whole. But yesterday it received a treatment unmatched hereabouts for a long while. One reason for the improvement was the splendid condition of Lauritz Melchior's voice in his negotiation of the name part. Mr. Melchior customarily struggles manfully, but rather futilely, with the difficult music allotted him in this division of the opera. On this occasion, however, he had his tones under superior control, and succeeded in making even the trying measures of "Dir toene Lob" well forth in free and well-rounded sounds.

Under these auspicious conditions the great duet of the opening scene, with Kerstin Thorborg as the Venus and Mr. Melchior in his best estate, boasted a really memorable interpretation.

Most operatic impersonators of Venus are not able to supply the pulchritude expected of the delineator of this fairest goddess of the pantheon. Miss Thorborg made a plausible appeal to the eye and her acting was natural, graceful and appealing. She was in superb voice, delivering every phrase with splendid tone as well as convincing power and eloquence. She was equally effective in the more seductive moments of the score and in those depicting rage, vindictiveness or despair.

Since last heard here in this opera, Kirsten Flagstad has brought a deeper insight to her interpretation of Elisabeth. She has sung it as superbly from the vocal angle heretofore, but never with such searching human feeling. The gain in expressiveness was nowhere more telling than in the finale. Of the second act, where from the poignant cry, "Zurueck von ihm," onwards, the emotional content of the music was revealed with new and profoundly touching fervor, tenderness and simplicity.

Herbert Janssen made a sympathetic, rich-voiced Wolfram, and did some of the best singing yet heard from him during the afternoon. The Landgraf of Emanuel List was a dignified portrayal, and during his contributions to the noteworthy performance Mr. List's tones were more firm and steady than usual. Maxine Stellman sang adequately as the young shepherd, but Mack Harrell's voice was too light for Biterolf's music.

The chorus did its share in making the occasion a success, and the ballet, though not always with the orchestra, danced the bacchanale with considerable élan.

Never before had Mr. Leinsdorf made the orchestra sound as rich and sensitive in this work, and his tempi were far better chosen than previously. He still favored a very brisk pace for the march of the second act. Otherwise he was more prone to follow tradition than heretofore, and the orchestra played under his leadership with the same enthusiasm that marked the endeavors of all concerned in this outstanding performance, which was heard by a demonstrative capacity audience.

Noel Straus, The New York Times, January 5 1941

# Wagner

## TANNHÄUSER

CDs 1 & 2: Acts 1 & 2

Lauritz Melchior

Kirsten Flagstad

Emanuel List

Herbert Janssen

Kerstin Thorberg

Metropolitan Opera  
Erich Leinsdorf, conductor

Live recording, 4 January 1941

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# WAGNER *Tannhäuser*

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph  
of Lauritz Melchior as Tannhäuser

Wagner Tannhäuser  
NBC Radio Broadcast  
4 January, 1941  
Metropolitan Opera House  
New York City

Total duration: 2hr 57:32

## CD One Act 1

- 1 Overture (16:33)
- 2 Naht euch dem Strande! (5:25)
- 3 Geliebter, sag wo weilt dein Sinn? (4:38)
- 4 Dir töne Lob! (5:14)
- 5 Geliebter, komm! Sieh dort die Grotte (10:49)
- 6 Frau Holda kam aus dem Berg hervor (8:31)
- 7 Wer ist dort in brünstigem Gebete? (5:05)
- 8 Als du in kühnem Sange uns bestrittest (5:39)

## CD Two Act 2

- 1 Prelude, Scene Dich, theure Halle (4:38)
- 2 Dort ist sie; nahe dich ihr ungestört! (6:55)
- 3 Den Gott der Liebe sollst du preisen (2:22)
- 4 Dich treff' ich hier in dieser Halle (4:09)
- 5 Freudig begrüßen wir die edle Halle (7:28)
- 6 Gar viel und schön ward hier in dieser Halle (5:47)
- 7 Blick' ich umher in diesem edlen Kreise (6:28)
- 8 Heraus zum Kampfe mit uns allen! (4:10)
- 9 Was hör' ich! (12:07)
- 10 Ein furchtbares Verbrechen ward begangen (6:07)

Metropolitan Opera

*Erich Leinsdorf, conductor*

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"An aura of distinction envelopes the entire performance, and nowhere more so than in Flagstad's portrayal. Her vocalism is incredibly fresh, and more surprisingly, so is her characterization of Elisabeth. For once she has shed even the suggestion of the heroic in both tone and manner....Some alchemy has allowed silver to penetrate the characteristic bronze metal of her instrument, and even at the softest dynamic the voice is perfectly poised....In top vocal form throughout the afternoon, [Melchior] never retreats before the notorious tessitura of the rôle; at the opera's end, his Rome Narrative is a tour de force of technical mastery...."

*Paul Jackson* Saturday Afternoons at the Old Met (Amadeus Press, p. 258)

### *Producer's Note*

Without doubt one of the great recorded performances of Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser*, this 1941 radio broadcast, live from New York's Metropolitan Opera House, follows our recent release of the Met's 1940 production of *Die Walküre* and was drawn from very similar source material, allowing us to offer a previously undreamed of sound quality in these recordings.

Of that *Walküre* issue, Henry Fogel wrote in *Fanfare* magazine:

"Sony and the Met, in their set Wagner at the Met, issued this same performance, and one might wonder why Pristine would bother. After all, the resources of the Metropolitan Opera Company and Sony should permit the transfer to be as good as technology is capable of. And indeed I have enjoyed that edition for the year or so that I have owned it. I am sure Sony and the Met did the best they could with what they had, but Andrew Rose of Pristine was given a different source (he is discreet and doesn't indicate from whom), a set of transfers on a completely different plane from the Sony release, not to mention inferior earlier issues..."

An A-B comparison of this with the Sony set is shocking. The difference is not subtle. The Sony set sounds like a 1940 AM broadcast. This sounds like a professional studio commercial recording from 1940, and a good one at that. Pristine's XR stereo remastering gives a sense of the space of the Met, and the result is thrilling in a way one never thought this performance would be."

If some of the sides in the present recording of *Tannhäuser* were not quite as clean as one might hope for, and the microphone placement is a little further back from the principal singers by comparison to *Die Walküre*, this is perhaps minor criticism in the context of what these generally well-preserved discs have to offer. Once again, XR remastering, coupled with Ambient Stereo processing, serves up an aural and musical treat which surely renders this an absolute must-have for Wagnerians. As the New York Times stated on the day following this performance: "Every singer of the strong cast happened to be in exceptionally fine vocal form, and the orchestra, under Erich Leinsdorf, provided a support worthy of the expert achievements of those on stage" - what more could one possibly ask for?

*Andrew Rose*



# Wagner

## TANNHÄUSER

CD 3: Act 3

Lauritz Melchior

Kirsten Flagstad

Emanuel List

Herbert Janssen

Kerstin Thorberg

Metropolitan Opera

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Live recording, 4 January 1941

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### CD Three Act 3

- 1 Introduction - Tannhäuser's Pilgrimage (7:45)
- 2 Wohl wußt' ich hier sie im Gebet zu finden (7:37)
- 3 Allmächt'ge Jungfrau, hör mein Flehen! (9:59)
- 4 Wie Todesahnung - O du, mein holder Abendstern (4:29)
- 5 Ich hörte Harfenschlag (3:50)
- 6 Hör an, Wolfram, hör an! (8:56)
- 7 Ha! Fühltest du nicht milde Lüfte? (5:01)
- 8 Heill! Heill! Der Gnade Wunder Heill! (2:25)
- 9 Applause and radio commentary (Milton Cross) (5:26)

### CAST

|                  |                         |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| Landgraf Hermann | <i>Emanuel List</i>     |
| Tannhäuser       | <i>Lauritz Melchior</i> |
| Wolfram          | <i>Herbert Janssen</i>  |
| Walther          | <i>John Dudley</i>      |
| Biterolf         | <i>Mach Harrell</i>     |
| Heinrich         | <i>Emery Darcy</i>      |
| Reinmar          | <i>John Gurney</i>      |
| Elisabeth        | <i>Kirsten Flagstad</i> |
| Venus            | <i>Kerstin Thorborg</i> |
| A Young Shepherd | <i>Maxine Stellman</i>  |

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus

*Erich Leinsdorf, conductor*

*Konrad Neuger, chorus master*

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