



Leinsdorf

Wagner: Lohengrin



Richard Wagner's *Lohengrin* has played an important part in the history of the Metropolitan Opera since its inaugural season in the Old House at 39th and Broadway. It was the very first Wagner opera ever performed by the company on 7 November 1883 and was presented consecutively for nine seasons in a row. It was also the first Wagner opera ever broadcast by the Met when on 9 January 1932, the third act was heard with Max Lorenz, Maria Müller, Karin Branzell and conducted by Artur Bodanzky. To date, it has had 618 performances, more than any other of Wagner's works. Many consider *Lohengrin* the most Italianate of all of the composer's operas with clearly delineated arias, duets, and ensembles, which perhaps accounts for its popularity.

The 1939–40 season proved to be a banner year for Wagner at the Met when no fewer than six broadcasts of five of his operas were presented (*Die Walküre* was broadcast twice). The Met was in the midst of a financial crisis and there was an extensive fund-raising campaign throughout the season. General Director Edward Johnson knew that the Wagnerian singers on his roster were sure-fire box office draws for audiences both in the house and on the radio. This was, after all, by all accounts, the golden age of Wagnerian singing. Kirsten Flagstad, Lotte Lehmann, Elizabeth Rethberg, Marjorie Lawrence, Kersten Thorborg, Karin Branzell, Lauritz Melchior, Friedrich Schorr, Herbert Janssen, Julius Huehn, Emanuel List, and Ludwig Hofmann were all a part of the firmament. And sure enough, no fewer than four of these illustrious singers play an integral role in this broadcast.

It seems almost superfluous to acknowledge that Danish tenor Lauritz Melchior was the greatest Heldentenor tenor of his, or possibly, any generation. Yet one never ceases to be amazed by the apparent effortlessness of his singing of some of the most difficult music ever written. But unlike Siegfried or Tristan (available on PACO139 and PACO150, respectively) *Lohengrin* requires extensive lyrical singing and here is where Melchior surprises us. From his opening farewell to the swan that has carried him to Brabant to his tender farewell to Elsa, Melchior's singing emulates the greatest exponents of the bel canto tradition. Making his Met debut as *Tannhäuser* on 17 February 1926, Melchior sang *Lohengrin* (of which this is the fourth of his ten broadcasts of the role) a total of 68 times at the Met. His penultimate performance of the role also proved to be his final Met broadcast on 7 January 1950. A little less than a month later, on 2 February 1950, he would sing the role one last time and his magnificent 24-year Met career would come to an end.

Aida was the role that served as both the Met debut (22 November 1922) and farewell (6 March 1942) of German soprano Elisabeth Rethberg. During her twenty-year Met career, she sang most of the Wagnerian Jugendlich dramatischer Sopran roles and even sang two performances of the *Siegfried* Brünnhilde in her final season with the company. She was also a noted Madama Butterfly and Leonora in *Il Trovatore*. Rethberg participated in the very first broadcast sponsored by Texaco on 7 December 1940 singing the Countess Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. She sang almost 400 performances of 29 roles with the company, two of which were US premieres. Rethberg sang Elsa twenty times with the company and this was her third and final broadcast of the opera.

One need not look any further than this broadcast to understand the level of Wagnerian singing during the Met at this time when it was able to turn to Kerstin Thorborg to step in at short notice to replace her ailing colleague, Karin Branzell, to sing Ortrud on this afternoon. The Swedish mezzo-soprano made her Met debut as Fricka in *Die Walküre* on 21 December 1936 and sang in all ten of Wagner's mature operas during her 14-year career with the company. She sang in the first Met broadcasts of *Orfeo ed Euridice* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, both in 1938, and *Boris Godunov* in 1939. Thorborg sang Ortrud 27 times with the Met and this was the first of her six broadcasts of the role. Her final performance took place on 8 February 1950 as Magdalene in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

Notes continue in next insert...

wagner

lohengrin

discs one & two: acts I & II



PACO 160



lohengrin lauritz melchior
elsa elisabeth rethberg
ortrud kerstin thorborg
telramund julius huehn
king heinrich emanuel list
herald leonard warren

metropolitan opera orchestra & chorus
conductor erich leinsdorf
live broadcast performance, 1940

wagner

lohengrin

disc one

1. Radio Introduction (2:09)
2. Prelude (8:00)

ACT I

3. Hört, Grafen, Edle, Freie von Brabant! (2:33)
4. Dank, König, dir, daß du zu richten kamst! (6:00)
5. Seht hin! Sie naht, die hart Beklagte! (3:05)
6. Einsam in trüben Tagen (6:30)
7. Des Ritters will ich wahren (2:37)
8. Ohn' Antwort ist der Ruf verhallt! (4:13)
9. Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan! (4:50)
10. Wenn ich im Kampfe für dich siege (3:19)
11. Welch holde Wunder muss ich sehen? (3:23)
12. Nun höret mich und achtet wohl (7:07)
13. Durch Gottes Sieg ist jetzt dein Leben mein (3:11)
14. Curtain calls (2:05)

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Lauritz Melchior as Lohengrin

Broadcast performance of 27 January, 1940
Metropolitan Opera House, New York

Total duration: 3hr 8:22

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disc two

1. Radio Introduction (1:04)

ACT II

2. Introduction (3:29)
3. Erhebe dich, Genossin meiner Schmach! (3:04)
4. Was macht dich in so wilder Klage doch vergehn? (3:58)
5. Du wilde Seherin (6:24)
6. Euch Lüften, die mein Klagen (3:24)
7. Elsa! (4:49)
8. Ortrud, wo bist du? (9:08)
9. In Früh'n versammelt uns der Ruf (3:43)
10. Des Königs Wort und Will' tu ich euch kund (5:39)
11. Gesegnet soll sie schreiten (4:50)
12. Zurück, Elsa! Nicht länger will ich dulden (7:40)
13. O König! Trugbetörte Fürsten! Haltet ein! (4:58)
14. Mein Held, entgegne kühn dem Ungetreuen (5:45)
15. Curtain calls (2:42)

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus
conducted by Erich Leinsdorf



Leinsdorf

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Notes continued from previous insert...

Our Telramund, American baritone Julius Huehn, made his Met debut as The Herald in *Lohengrin* on 21 December 1935. Within in two years he transitioned to the role we hear him sing on this recording. During his 11-year Met career he sang almost all of the important Wagnerian baritone roles. Huehn sang in the Met broadcast premieres of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Fidelio* (his 1941 broadcast of the opera is available on PACO117), all in 1936. Singing twenty roles in over 200 performances, he made his farewell on 23 March 1946 as Wolfram in *Tannhäuser*. After leaving the Met, Huehn taught voice at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York.

Viennese-born Emanuel List was the preeminent Wagnerian bass at the Metropolitan Opera between his debut as Hermann in *Tannhäuser* on 27 December 1933 and his farewell as Baron Ochs in *Der Rosenkavalier* on 1 April 1950. He sang eleven roles in all ten of Wagner's mature works as well as operas by Mozart, Beethoven and Saint-Saëns for a total of 448 performances. He sang in the first Met broadcasts of *Salome* in 1934, *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, *Fidelio* and *Samson et Dalila* in 1936 and *Der Rosenkavalier* in 1938. He will undoubtedly be remembered for his memorable portrayal of Hunding in the historic recording of Act One of *Die Walküre* recorded in 1935 with Lotte Lehmann, Lauritz Melchior, and conducted by Bruno Walter (available on PACO024). List Hall at the Metropolitan Opera House is named in his honour.

Leonard Warren made his first appearance with the Metropolitan Opera in a Gala Concert on 27 November 1938, and his official debut was as Paolo in *Simon Boccanegra* on 13 January 1939. Acclaimed as one of the greatest American Verdi baritones of all time (he sang 12 roles in 11 of the composer's works), he performed a total of 657 times with the company in a vast array of roles from Ilo in the world premiere of Menotti's *The Island God* to Rangoni in *Boris Godunov*. Perhaps his most famous portrayal was that of the hunchback Rigoletto, which he performed at the Met 89 times (his second of nine broadcasts of the opera is available on PACO143). Warren had just sung the title role in a new production of *Simon Boccanegra* three days before his untimely death at 48 years old during a performance of *La Forza del Destino*.

Erich Leinsdorf was recommended to the Metropolitan Opera by no less than Arturo Toscanini when the company realized that it needed a conductor to assist Artur Bodanzky with his taxing schedule. This proved to be a wise move by the company for when Bodanzky took ill on the evening of 21 January 1938, it allowed the 25-year old Leinsdorf to step in to make his debut conducting *Die Walküre*. It was the beginning of what would be an illustrious, if somewhat turbulent, career for the young Viennese maestro. He would stay with the company on and off for forty-five years, conducting his final performance on 5 March 1983 (a broadcast performance of *Arabella*), and tallying up a total of 483 performances of 28 operas. One of the most interesting aspects of this performance are the many cuts that he restores. During the Bodanzky years, a typical performance of *Lohengrin* would cut up to as many as 684 measures of music. Leinsdorf would restore 247 of them on this afternoon. Perhaps one of Leinsdorf's most significant legacies to Metropolitan Opera broadcast history were his performances of the first uncut presentation of Wagner's Ring Cycle to be heard complete during the 1961-62 season (available on PACO152, 153, 155 and 156).

A set of newly-discovered unused acetate discs served as the basis for this release giving us the opportunity to hear the voices of some of the greatest Wagnerian singers of any generation as never before and is sonically quite possibly the best of Melchior's numerous live recordings of the opera. A special feature of this release is some of Milton Cross' erudite commentary which sets the mood and transports us back to the time when Wagnerian singing reached its zenith and helped to keep the Metropolitan Opera alive for years to come.

Notes by Michael Scarola

A longer version of these notes can be found online at Pristine Classical

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lohengrin

disc three: acts III



PACO 160



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WAGNER LOHENGRIN - Act 3
MELCHIOR, RETHBERG, THORBORG, HUEHN, LIST, WARREN, MET OPERA, LEINSDORF

wagner

lohengrin

disc three

1. Radio Introduction (1:13)

ACT III

2. Prelude (3:03)
3. Treulich geführt ziehet dahin (4:26)
4. Das süße Lied verhallt (3:08)
5. Wie hehr erkenn' ich unsrer Liebe Wesen! (6:38)
6. Höchstes Vertrauen hast du mir schon zu danken (3:54)
7. Ach nein! Doch dort - der Schwan! (6:02)
8. Heil König Heinrich! (4:39)
9. Was bringen die? Was tun sie kund? (6:56)
10. In fernem Land, unnahbar euren Schritten (5:24)
11. Mir schwankt der Boden! Welche Nacht! (0:46)
12. Mein lieber Schwan! (7:07)
13. Curtain calls (5:26)

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Broadcast performance of 27 January, 1940
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CAST

Lohengrin - Lauritz Melchior

Elsa - Elisabeth Rethberg

Ortrud - Kerstin Thorborg

Telramund - Julius Huehn

King Heinrich - Emanuel List

Herald - Leonard Warren

Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus
conducted by Erich Leinsdorf

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WAGNER LOHENGRIN - Act 3
MELCHIOR, RETHBERG, THORBORG, HUEHN, LIST, WARREN, MET OPERA, LEINSDORF

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