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Furtwängler conducts Brahms

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Furtwängler conducted both Brahms piano concertos during all phases of his career, but there were nearly twice as many performances of the Second, the only one to have come down to us on records. There are two versions, both stemming from the war years and separated by thirteen months; each was given as part of a subscription concert by the Berlin Philharmonic. The soloist in the first was Edwin Fischer, and in the second, Adrian Aeschbacher, with whom Furtwängler collaborated on Beethoven's First Piano Concerto in Lucerne after the war.

As with their EMI studio recording of the Emperor Concerto, Furtwängler and Fischer are again as one. There is a many-faceted account of a massive score, and like the music, the performance is symphonic and far-reaching in its dimensions. With this too there is "youthful" willingness on the part of Furtwängler and Fischer to give generously of themselves. The Second Concerto is a work that conductors and performers often even out, minimizing the sweep of the first and second movements so they are more in line with the reflective slow movement and the airy grace of the finale.

Not so with Furtwängler and Fischer. They follow where the music leads and appear to revel in its many phases of sound and its contrasting emotions. With this comes the sensation of an autumn tempest eventually playing itself out and leaving in its wake coolness and serenity. In harmony with their stormy approach to the opening movement, the allegro appassionato, while not notably faster than the norm, has a livelier impulse than usual and less a feeling of binding weight. Not surprisingly, the second-movement repeat is observed in both performances, for this is an instance where a repeat in Brahms is entirely organic. Though Fischer's beautifully textured playing permeates the slow movement with a blissful, nocturnal calm, some urgency is still felt, and it emerges openly in playful, *Fritzel*-like passages in the finale.

Aeschbacher makes less of a cohesive whole out of the music. His performance is not as well thought-out, and there are moments where he strikes out on his own in a direction different from that established by Furtwängler and the orchestra. He is, on the whole, technically more solid than Fischer, though Fischer can surprise one at times with unexpected prowess, as in the rising double thirds that come early in the last movement. With Fischer, even note sounds in tempo, while Aeschbacher glibly leaves notes out. In short, there is no choice here. One is an experience; the other is a performance.

John Ardoin "The Furtwängler Record" (Amadeus Press, 1994) - *entry concerning Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2*

Transfer notes

Both of these wartime recordings originated as radio broadcasts and were among a number which disappeared into the Soviet Union at the end of World War II. They suffer similar defects to the majority of Furtwängler's wartime broadcasts, both in sound balance and distortion during louder passages. My aim has been to minimise the effect of these and to try and round out the rather poor, one-dimensional sound of the originals. The better sound is to be found in the Brahms, which has greater top-end frequency extension, and is without doubt the star performance here - it sounds remarkably well given its origins. The Schumann, his only surviving recording of the piece, is perhaps less successful both as performance and recording, but is at least much cleaned up over previous issues. **AR**

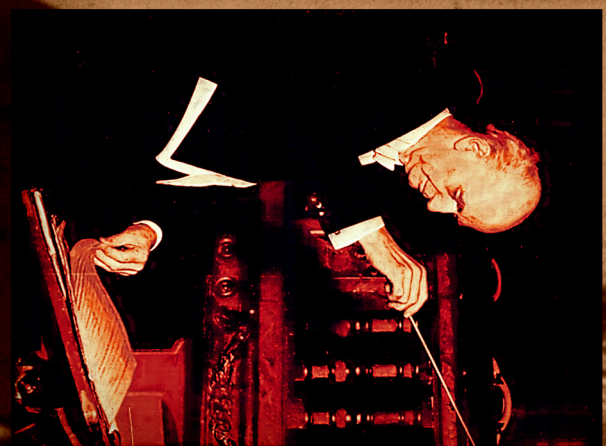
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Brahms
Piano Concerto No. 2

Edwin Fischer, piano

Schumann

Piano Concerto

Walter Gieseking, piano

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

Live recordings, Berlin 1942

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FURTWÄNGLER CONDUCTS BRAHMS AND SCHUBERT PIANO CONCERTOS
FURTWÄNGLER, FISCHER, GIESEKING, BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

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Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2
Transfer from EMI LP SG 153-53661 M
Recorded 8 November 1942
Alte Philharmonie, Berlin

Schumann Piano Concerto
Transfer from DG LP 427 773-1
Recorded 3 March 1942
Alte Philharmonie, Berlin

Total duration: **77:26**

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Furtwängler Brahms & Schumann

BRAHMS Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat, Op. 83

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro non troppo (16:53)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Allegro appassionato (8:31)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Andante (12:32) (Arthur Troester, cello)
- 4 4th mvt. - Allegretto grazioso (9:15)

Edwin Fischer piano

SCHUMANN Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 54

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro affettuoso (14:58)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Intermezzo: Andantino grazioso (5:47)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro vivace (9:30)

Walter Gieseking piano

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Wilhelm Furtwängler