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FURTWÄNGLER

conducts Richard Strauss

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Then there's the Strauss. Rarely can a first performance have served any music and its composer so well. Flagstad is totally immersed in the words and the notes (though she does opt for a G instead of the top Bb at "*wie ein Wunder vor mir*" in the first song). Even through the murky sound, the rhythmic and textural clarity secured by Furtwängler in the Philharmonia's playing is undeniable; note, for example, the harmonic progression at the words "*alle meine Sinne nun*" in "*Beim Schlafengehen*." The entire performance glows from beginning to end, as it should. To my mind, no one who knows the *Four Last Songs* should be without this world premiere rendition, but I'm also grateful to have received a review copy at no cost. You'll have to decide for yourself.

Review by Marc Mandel, Fanfare, Sept/Oct 1993, *excerpt*

Producer's Note

The decision to tackle Flagstad and Furtwängler's legendary première recording of Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs* in the year of the composer's 150th birthday was taken following the suggestion of a correspondent who e-mailed me last summer with the idea. That it's taken more than nine months to bring to fruition has much to say for the difficulties involved in trying to do anything to improve the frankly abysmal quality of the original recording, originally captured on acetate discs that have seen far too many heavy needles over the years.

The flaws inherent in the original recordings are myriad: Surface noise is a constant intrusion; Thumps, bumps, clicks and scratches abound; The frequency range is limited, the frequency response deeply unrepresentative; Swish is endless to the point of being almost overwhelming; Distortion rears its head too often. Restoration and remastering technology can help enormously - XR remastering brings out much of the orchestral richness and texture and lifts a veil from Kirsten Flagstad's voice, whilst pitch correction helps with wayward wow and flutter. Much of the swish has been smoothed out, and noise reduction has done just that. The recording remains pretty compromised, as I suspect it always will, but once the ears have adjusted to the shortcomings of the medium there's much to be enjoyed and cherished.

The other three recordings were made in the Musikvereinssaal in Vienna for commercial releases. The first, *Tod und Verklärung*, was originally destined for 78rpm issue in 1950, and although it would have been taped, is of noticeably lower quality than the later, 1954 recordings. Hiss levels were higher and the upper frequencies less well defined - though of course all three recordings are much, much better from a technical point of view than the *Four Last Songs*. As with the *Songs*, the recordings all responded very well to XR remastering, which has once more brought new life and light to the orchestral sound. **Andrew Rose**

FULL PROGRAMME NOTES CAN BE FOUND ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM
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Furtwängler

conducts Richard Strauss

Death and Transfiguration
Don Juan
Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks
Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Four Last Songs
Kirsten Flagstad, soprano
Philharmonia Orchestra

Studio and Live Recordings 1950/54

FURTWÄNGLER

conducts *Richard Strauss*

- 1 Tod und Verklärung, Op. 24 (24:35)
- 2 Don Juan, Op. 20 (18:48)
- 3 Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche, Op. 28 (16:25)

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Vier Letzte Lieder Op. Post.

- 4 1. Beim Schlafengehen (5:12)
- 5 2. September (4:20)
- 6 3. Frühling (2:46)
- 7 4. Im Abendrot (7:51)

Kirsten Flagstad *soprano*
Philharmonia Orchestra

Wilhelm Furtwängler *conductor*

XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Wilhelm Furtwängler

Tod und Verklärung
Recorded 21, 23, 24 January 1950
Recording producer: Walter Legge
Recording Engineer: Anthony Griffith

Don Juan
Recorded 2 March, 1954
Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche
Recorded 3 March, 1954

Recording producer: Lawrence Collingwood
Recording Engineer: Francis Dillnutt

Recorded at the Musikvereinssaal, Vienna

Vier Letzte Lieder
Recorded 22 May, 1950
World Première, Royal Albert Hall, London

Total duration: 79:57

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