



Furtwängler conducts Brahms



"...Finally, we come to the Brahms disc. The *Haydn Variations* is a fine performance once again strengthened by the improvement in sonic clarity. But the *First Symphony* is even more than that. If you already know this performance and recording, you probably need not read further. But if you are unfamiliar with it, a few words are in order. This is the performance (in Tahra's prior transfer) I use most often to introduce Furtwängler to someone unfamiliar with his art. It has long been recognized as one of his greatest recorded documents, surprising since it is with neither of the two orchestras he worked with most regularly, but instead with the Hamburg Radio forces. The orchestra had been recently formed (under Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt), and Furtwängler was invited to lead an all-Brahms concert on October 27, 1951, culminating with this grand and mesmerizing performance of the First Symphony. From the intensity of the strings and timpani at the opening to the final chords, this is Brahms that grabs you by the throat and won't let go. It is at once dramatic and lyrical, genial and stern, heaven-storming, and intimate. It has always been one of Furtwängler's best-sounding recordings, and was Tahra's first release over 10 years ago (FURT 1001). It was mightily impressive then, but now, shorn of the excessive "ambience" that had been added, it sounds even more natural and powerful. No one who loves this symphony should be without this recording..."

Henry Fogel, Fanfare magazine, 2001

Review of 2001 release as part of Tahra CD set

Producer's Note

The *Fanfare* review of a previous remastering of these recordings offers great praise not only for the superlative performance, but also the advances in sound quality that were achieved between 1991 and 2001. A decade is a long time in sound restoration technology in the digital age. And so, nearly two decades on from the reviewed release, we can hear in the present Ambient Stereo XR-remaster just how much further progress has been made since the beginning of the present century. Sound once described as "natural and powerful" sounds today somewhat brittle and shrill, if certainly clean. There's an unnatural tubbiness and boxiness to the recording and a distinct lack of warmth and lower end heft. These are among the undesirable qualities the present release aims to deal with.

The early 1950s might well be regarded as the dawn of the hi-fi era. With the advent of vinyl long-playing records the home listener was finally starting to hear what recording engineers had known possible since the late 1930s, and things were improving apace across the world of recorded sound quality. Nevertheless there was still quite some way to go, and while the microphones used here in 1951 certainly were capable of capturing fine sound they were far from perfect. Rebalancing this sound using today's cutting-edge digital technology reveals the full depth and breadth of Furtwängler's orchestra, something only previously hinted at, as well as revealing hidden colours and detail previously obscured. It really is a total transformation; anyone who's ever loved this recording in the past really must hear it again in this fabulous new incarnation.

Andrew Rose



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BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO. 1, HAYDN VARIATIONS
FURTWÄNGLER SINFONIEORCHESTER DES NORDWESTDEUTSCHEN RUNDFUNKS

furtwängler

conducts brahms

COMPACT
disc
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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Furtwängler

Live broadcast recording
27 October 1951
Musikhalle, Hamburg

Total duration: 68:44

BRAHMS Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op.56

1. Theme. Andante (2:24)
2. Variation 1. Poco più animato (1:20)
3. Variation 2. Più vivace (1:08)
4. Variation 3. Con moto (2:10)
5. Variation 4. Andante con moto (2:56)
6. Variation 5. Vivace (1:00)
7. Variation 6. Vivace (1:34)
8. Variation 7. Grazioso (3:23)
9. Variation 8. Presto non troppo (1:09)
10. Finale. Andante (4:07)

BRAHMS Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

11. 1st mvt. - Un poco sostenuto - Allegro (14:59)
12. 2nd mvt. - Andante sostenuto (10:09)
13. 3rd mvt. - Un poco allegretto e grazioso (5:13)
14. 4th mvt. - Adagio - Allegro non troppo, ma con brio (17:12)

Sinfonieorchester des Nordwestdeutschen Rundfunks
conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler

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