

Bruno Walter's relationship with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* was not merely interpretative but personal. As Mahler's close associate and trusted interpreter, Walter returned to this work repeatedly across his career, each performance reflecting a slightly different emotional climate. This Carnegie Hall concert from 22 February 1953 preserves one of his most compelling late readings: urgent, humane, and shaped with the authority of lived experience.

The performance survives as part of a radio broadcast, and unusually for *Das Lied von der Erde*, the programme opens not with Mahler but with *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. The presence of Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia* is more than incidental. Heard here in close proximity to Mahler's farewell to life, it sets a reflective, spacious frame — English modal stillness giving way to Mahler's more restless, questioning voice. In restoring this broadcast, the spoken announcements (fragmentary and incomplete) have been removed, but the Vaughan Williams has been retained and identified as part of the original event.

Walter's Mahler is distinguished by forward motion and natural speech-rhythm. Tempi are spacious without ever becoming indulgent, and the long paragraphs unfold with a sense of inevitability rather than careful calculation. This is not Mahler as monument, but Mahler as lived drama. Climaxes are allowed to arrive rather than be manufactured, and the quieter passages carry an intensity born of concentration, not restraint.

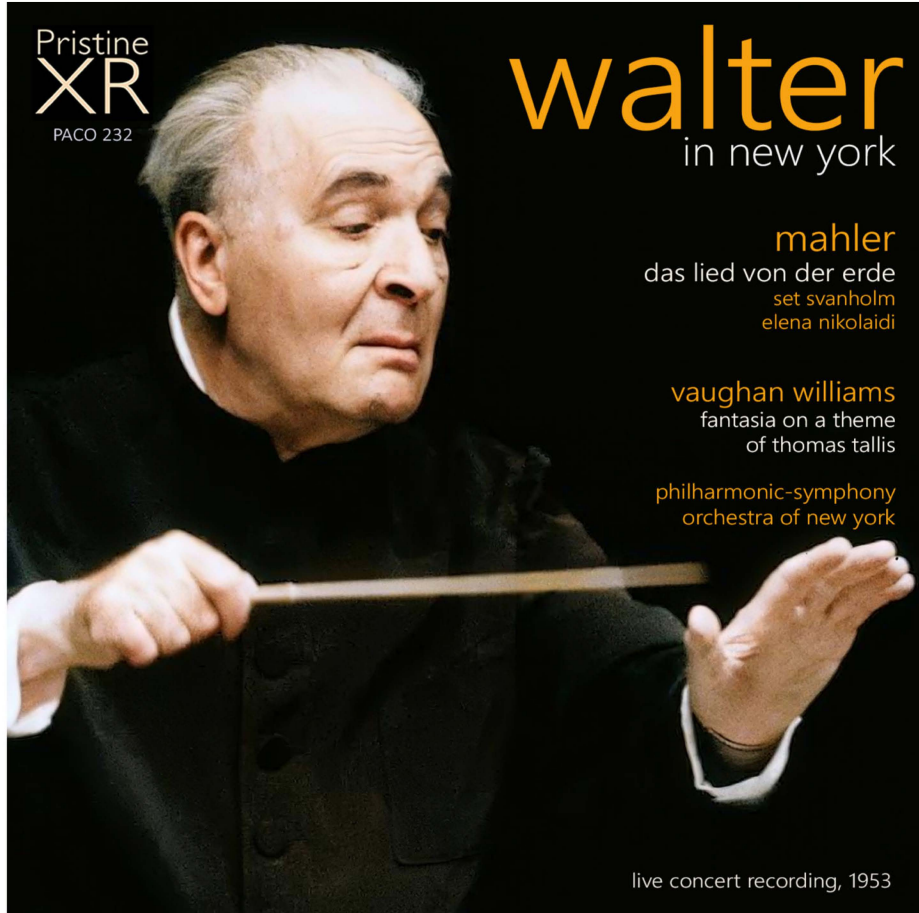
Set Svanholm's contribution is particularly striking in this newly restored transfer. Long characterised in earlier issues by a metallic edge, his tenor here emerges with a far more integrated tonal profile. The brilliance remains — necessary for the drinking songs' biting irony — but the hardness has vanished. What comes through instead is clarity of line, stamina, and an expressive directness that serves Mahler's alternation between bravado and disillusion with remarkable honesty.

Elena Nikolaidi brings a contrasting strength: centred, steady, and unsentimental. She does not seek an otherworldly aura, but communicates Mahler's text with gravity and poise. In *Der Abschied*, her long phrases are sustained with calm authority, allowing the movement's emotional weight to accumulate gradually. The result is a farewell that feels earned rather than consoling — deeply human, and all the more moving for it.

Because this is a live performance, the orchestra plays with a heightened sense of alertness. Woodwind lines flicker in and out of focus, inner voices speak clearly, and tutti have weight without heaviness. Walter's control of balance ensures that the singers remain integrated within the orchestral texture, never riding above it, never submerged by it.

Sonically, this restoration represents a decisive reappraisal of the performance. Earlier transfers inevitably reflected the limitations of their time, but here the sound is open, present, and remarkably immediate. There is no residual hum, no veil of age: orchestral colour is vivid, voices are firmly placed, and the dynamic range allows Walter's long arcs to register fully. What emerges is not merely a "valuable historical document", but a performance that can be heard on its own musical terms.

This Carnegie Hall *Das Lied von der Erde* stands alongside Walter's finest Mahler recordings as a testament to his unique authority in this music. Framed by Vaughan Williams's *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, it captures a concert occasion of rare coherence and depth — Mahler's farewell illuminated by a conductor who understood its meaning from the inside.



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walter
in new york

mahler
das lied von der erde
set svanholm
elena nikolaidi

vaughan williams
fantasia on a theme
of thomas tallis

philharmonic-symphony
orchestra of new york

live concert recording, 1953

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MAHLER DAS LIED VON DER ERDE VAUGHAN WILLIAMS FANTASIA ON A THEME OF THOMAS TALLIS
NIKOLAIDI, SVANHOLM, PHILHARMONIC-SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA OF NEW YORK, WALTER

walter

in new york

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1. VAUGHAN WILLIAMS Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis (14:41)

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

MAHLER Das Lied von der Erde

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall,
New York City, 22 February 1953

2. 1. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde (8:57)

3. 2. Der Einsame im Herbst (8:41)

4. 3. Von der Jugend (3:33)

5. 4. Von der Sch nheit (6:28)

6. 5. Der Trunkene im Fr hling (4:36)

7. 6. Der Abschied (27:22)

Total duration: 74:18

Set Svanholm, tenor

Elena Nikolaidi, contralto

Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra of New York
conducted by Bruno Walter

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