

Among the many surviving post-war *Ring* cycles, the 1959 Covent Garden performances occupy a particularly fascinating place. They unite a remarkable company of Wagner singers, many of them veterans of Bayreuth and the international stage, with Franz Konwitschny, one of the major German conductors of his generation. Heard today, these performances offer far more than star casting. They preserve a style of Wagner singing and conducting poised between older dramatic immediacy and the more sculpted, symphonic approach that would increasingly dominate later decades.

Following *Das Rheingold*, this 23 September 1959 broadcast of *Die Walküre* brings us to the emotional heart of the cycle. If *Rheingold* is the glittering prelude to catastrophe, *Die Walküre* is where Wagner's drama becomes painfully human: the meeting of Siegmund and Sieglinde, Wotan's terrible conflict between power and love, Brünnhilde's awakening compassion, and the final, devastating farewell between father and daughter. It is also the point at which a *Ring* performance must prove itself not merely by splendour, but by its capacity for intimacy, tenderness and sustained dramatic pressure.

The 1959 Covent Garden *Ring* was eagerly followed in the press, though reviewers tended to discuss the cycle as a whole rather than each broadcast separately. What emerges clearly from their accounts is that Konwitschny's arrival was felt as a significant change after Rudolf Kempe's earlier Royal Opera performances. Critics noted that Kempe had shaped the four operas with a strong sense of overall continuity, while Konwitschny worked in shorter spans, giving particular scenes a vivid surge and theatrical sharpness. He was not a conductor afraid of rough edges or dramatic force, and contemporary reports suggest that he could drive climaxes with considerable power while remaining unusually attentive to the balance between stage and pit.


That quality is essential in *Die Walküre*, where voices must ride the orchestra without being submerged by it. The cast is led by Astrid Varnay as Brünnhilde, Hans Hotter as Wotan, Ramón Vinay as Siegmund and Amy Shuard as Sieglinde. Varnay was already one of the great Brünnhildes of the age, a singer whose vocal authority and dramatic concentration had become defining features of post-war Wagner performance. Hotter's Wotan likewise needs little introduction: by 1959 he had lived with the role for years, and his command of text, colour and inward conflict remained among the wonders of the Wagnerian stage.

The particular revelation for London audiences was Amy Shuard. Contemporary comment singled her out as one of the outstanding successes of the cycle. Making her first major Wagner appearance as Sieglinde, she was praised for vocal power, sympathetic acting and firmness of line. In an opera where Sieglinde can too easily become merely the object of Siegmund's ardour or Wotan's decree, Shuard evidently made a strong impression as a living, suffering woman, giving the first act its necessary emotional charge.

Ramón Vinay's Siegmund was more controversial. By this stage in his career he brought immense experience and unmistakable presence, though some critics found aspects of the portrayal vocally and dramatically strained. Yet there is a compelling historical interest in hearing him here, not as an abstract ideal of lyrical heroism, but as a stage animal of the old school, throwing himself into Wagner's drama with the authority of a singer who had inhabited this repertoire at the highest level.

Konwitschny's *Walküre* may not always seek polish for its own sake. Its virtues lie elsewhere: momentum, urgency, strong theatrical profile and an instinctive understanding that Wagner's orchestra must breathe with the singers. In the great confrontations of Act II and the long farewell of Act III, the performance belongs to a tradition in which the *Ring* is first and foremost music drama, alive in the theatre, under pressure, and unfolding before an audience rather than preserved under studio glass.

The BBC sound is again remarkable for its period. Despite the inevitable limitations of a live Covent Garden relay from 1959, the balance between voices and orchestra is natural and engaging, with a strong sense of stage space and theatrical atmosphere. Pristine's Ambient Stereo XR remastering further opens the original broadcast image, restoring warmth, depth and presence while preserving the electricity of live performance. The result brings this great Covent Garden *Walküre* vividly into the present: not as a museum relic, but as a living document of Wagner performance at a crucial moment in its post-war history.



PACO 237
CD 1 & 2

konwitschny
wagner: der ring des nibelungen

die walküre

astrid varnay
hans hotter
ramón vinay
amy shuard
kurt böhme
ursula böse

orchestra of the
royal opera house,
covent garden

conducted by franz konwitschny

Pristine
XR

live recording, 1959

WAGNER Die Walküre

disc one (61:43)

ACT ONE

1. Prelude (2:50)

SCENE ONE

2. Wes Herd dies auch, hier muß ich rasten (3:41)

3. Kühllende Labung gab mir der Quell! (8:51)

SCENE TWO

4. Müd am Herd fand ich den Mann (4:44)

5. Friedmund darf ich nicht heißen (4:06)

6. Aus dem Wald trieb es mich fort (5:34)

7. Ich weiß ein wildes Geschlecht (5:28)

SCENE THREE

8. Ein Schwert verhiß mir der Vater (5:43)

9. Schläfst du, Gast? (6:39)

10. Winterstürme wichen dem Wonnemond (2:44)

11. Du bist der Lenz (6:34)

12. Wehwalt heißt du fürwahr! (4:49)

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House,
Covent Garden

conducted by Franz Konwitschny

XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of Franz Konwitschny

Total duration: 3hr 38:06

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disc two (79:37)

ACT TWO

1. Prelude (2:04)

SCENE ONE

2. Nun zäume dein Roß, reisige Maid! (2:56)

3. Der alte Sturm, die alte Müh! (4:24)

4. So ist es denn aus mit den ewigen Göttern (3:02)

5. Nichts lernstest du (5:37)

6. Was verlangst du? (5:22)

SCENE TWO

7. Schlimm, fürcht' ich, schloß der Streit (4:24)

8. Was keinem in Worten ich künde (5:49)

9. Ein andres ist's - achte es wohl! (10:01)

10. O sag, künde, was soll nun dein Kind! (6:55)

SCENE THREE

11. Raste nun hier; gönne dir Ruh! (3:13)

12. Hinweg! Hinweg! Flieh die Entweihte! (8:06)

SCENE FOUR

13. Siegmund! Sieh auf mich! (7:09)

14. Hehr bist du und heilig (5:43)

15. So wenig achtest du ewige Wonne! (4:52)

WAGNER Die Walküre

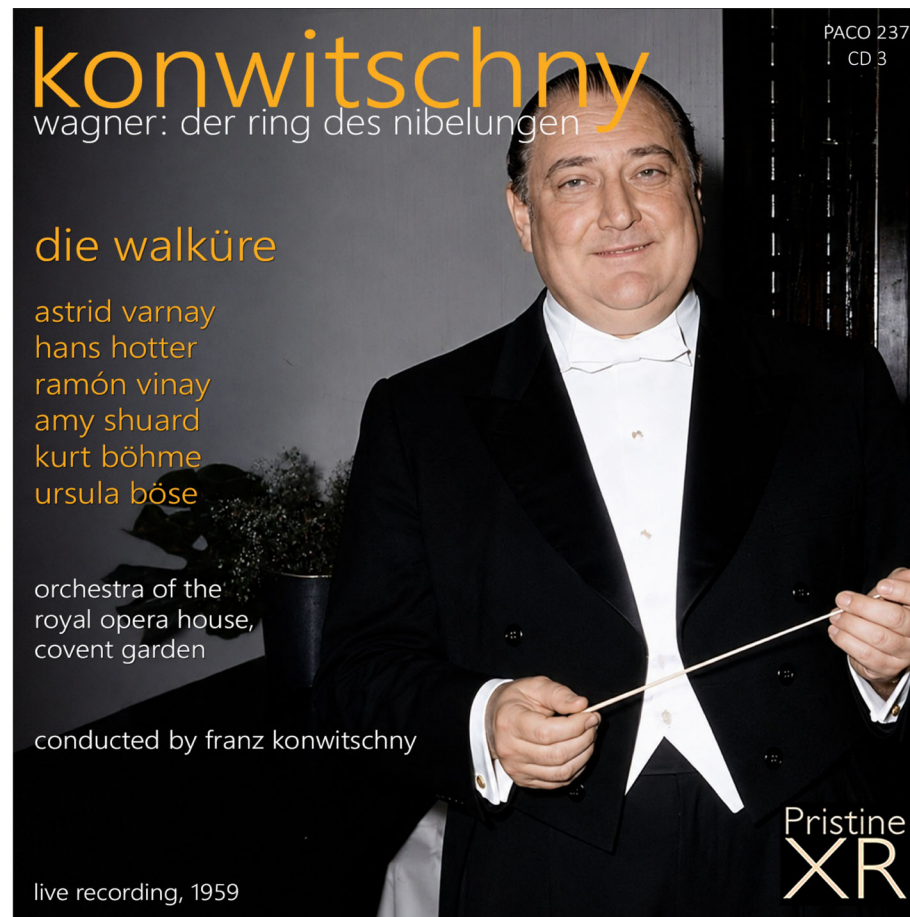
CAST

Siegmond - Ramón Vinay
Sieglinde - Amy Shuard
Hunding - Kurt Böhme
Brünnhilde - Astrid Varnay
Wotan - Hans Hotter
Fricka - Ursula Böse
Gerhilde - Joyce Barker
Ortlinde - Una Hale
Waltraute - Margreta Elkins
Schwertleite - Jean Watson
Helmwige - Judith Pierce
Siegfrune - Noreen Berry
Grimgerde - Heather Begg
Roßweiße - Josephine Veasey

Orchestra of the
Royal Opera House, Covent Garden
Leader: Charles Taylor

Conducted by Franz Konwitschny

BBC radio broadcast
Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London
23 September 1959



WAGNER Die Walküre

disc three (76:47)

ACT TWO, SCENE FIVE

1. Zauberfest bezähmt ein Schlaf (3:18)
2. Kehrete der Vater nur heim! (5:50)

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

3. Prelude - Hojotoho! Hojotoho! Heiaha! Heiaha! (8:40)
4. Schützt mich und helft in höchster Not! (3:28)
5. Nicht sehre dich Sorge um mich (5:07)

SCENE TWO

6. Steh, Brünnhild'! (0:54)
7. Wo ist Brünnhild', wo die Verbrecherin? (3:34)
8. Hier bin ich, Vater - gebiete die Strafe! (3:55)
9. Wehe! Weh! Schwester, ach Schwester! (4:30)

SCENE THREE

10. War es so schmäglich, was ich verbrach? (5:19)
11. Nicht weise bin ich, doch wusst' ich das eine (4:51)
12. So tatest du, was so gern zu tun ich begehrt? (6:31)
13. Du zeugtest ein edles Geschlecht (5:20)
14. Leb wohl, du kühnes, herrliches Kind! (2:08)
15. Denn einer nur freie die Braut (8:19)
16. Loge, hör! Lausche hieher! (5:03)

Orchestra of the Royal Opera House,
Covent Garden

conducted by Franz Konwitschny

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