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# Furtwängler Conducts Brahms

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Listening to these performances of the Fourth Symphony conducted by Furtwängler, ranging in time from 1943 to 1950, one is struck by the extraordinary consistency of his vision of the piece and his approach to it. It would seem that both were so firmly set in his mind and so circumscribed by his will that there was no room possible for variation or a need to experiment with form and tempo. The massive structuring of the work is like that of the First Symphony—a granitic monument that is equally an essay in drama and forceful dynamics—and with it Furtwängler releases a power and a sweep that match those he unleashed in the First...

...Everything Furtwängler accomplishes in the finale reflects and grows out of Brahms's marking of *allegro energico e passionato*. It is fast, it has energy, and above all it is streaked with passion. Along with these qualities, there is also a dizzying sense of controlled abandon, much like the sensations felt in his headstrong realization of the variations of Beethoven's Third Symphony. It is an elation that carries us through the sectional character of the movement, binds the variations tightly together, and peaks in a coda that is Dionysian in its frenzy. Within this high-powered expenditure of energy and passion there is an amazing island of repose—the espresso variation for solo flute, set against the woodwinds and accompanying strings.

The potential for this momentary release of tension before the great final push is, of course, a feature of the movement, but few conductors have seized upon its possibilities to such a concentrated extent, and used them to such high dramatic purpose as Furtwängler has. The most desirable of these four full versions of the Fourth is the wartime performance in Berlin; it exudes more heat and song than the others, has fewer ensemble problems than the Berlin performance of 1948, greater life than the Berliners in Wiesbaden the next year, and better sound than the Salzburg version of 1950, the only available Fourth with the Vienna Philharmonic.

**John Ardoin** "The Furtwängler Record" (Amadeus Press, 1994) - *excerpts from entry concerning Brahms' Symphony No. 4*

#### Transfer notes

The two recordings presented here both originated at the same concerts, which took place at the Alte Philharmonie in Berlin on 12 and 15 December 1943. They first appeared on Soviet *Melody* LP pressings in the 1960s, the recordings having disappeared into Russia at the end of the war. The present transfers were made from an EMI LP issue.

Despite the common source, there are some clear sonic differences between the two recordings, with the *Haydn Variations* having survived in slightly better condition than the *Fourth Symphony*. The latter, too, was pitched significantly higher in its EMI release than the *Variations* - a ridiculously unrealistic 44=453Hz compared to a far more believable 442Hz. The latter tallies up with readings of AC electrical hum present in both recordings, and it is to this pitch that the present issue has been matched. XR remastering has done much to improve the sound of the originals, bringing a wonderful new sense of life to the orchestra and rounding out the lower end magnificently.

Likewise the top end is remarkably extended for a recording of this vintage, though unfortunately the recording equipment of the day was prone to slight overload distortion at the loudest sections, something I've attempted to alleviate as much as possible. Elsewhere the sound quality is quite astonishing! I've also done away with a number of coughs and sneezes from a Berlin audience that sounded not in the best of health at the time. **AR**

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# Furtwängler

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**Brahms**  
Symphony No. 4  
Haydn Variations

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra**

Live recording, Berlin 1943

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BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO. 4 - HAYDN VARIATIONS  
FURTWÄNGLER, BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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XR remastering by **Andrew Rose**

Cover artwork based on photographs of  
**Wilhelm Furtwängler and Brahms**

## Furtwängler Brahms

### BRAHMS Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro non troppo (12:15)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Andante moderato (12:24)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Allegro giocoso (6:22)
- 4 4th mvt. - Allegro energico e passionato (9:26)

### BRAHMS Variations on a Theme by Haydn, Op. 56a

- 5 Theme - Chorale St. Antoni - Andante (2:12)
- 6 Variation I. Poco più animato (Andante con moto) (1:22)
- 7 Variation II. Più vivace (Vivace) (1:02)
- 8 Variation III. Con moto (2:05)
- 9 Variation IV. Andante con moto (Andante) (2:46)
- 10 Variation V. Vivace (Poco presto) (0:54)
- 11 Variation VI. Vivace (1:24)
- 12 Variation VII. Grazioso (3:28)
- 13 Variation VIII. Presto non troppo (Poco presto) (1:04)
- 14 Finale. Andante (3:46)

**Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra Wilhelm Furtwängler**

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BRAHMS SYMPHONY NO. 4 - HAYDN VARIATIONS  
FURTWÄNGLER, BERLIN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

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**Symphony No. 4**  
Transfer from EMI LP SG 153-53662 M  
Recorded 12/15 December 1943  
Alte Philharmonie, Berlin  
First issued as Melodiya D 09867/8

**Haydn Variations**  
Transfer from EMI LP SG 153-53662 M  
Recorded 12/15 December 1943  
Alte Philharmonie, Berlin  
First issued as Melodiya D 010854

Total duration: **60:30**

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