



Wilhelm Furtwängler conducts Schumann & Beethoven

aud 23.441

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I last reviewed Furtwängler's 26 August 1953 concert in Lucerne back in 2005 when the matter was complicated by virtue of Tahra's inclusion of Menuhin and Furtwängler's 1949 studio recording of the Brahms Concerto, extra Beethoven items and a rehearsal extract. That stretched things to a twofer and Audite also runs to two discs though the second one, which contains the Schumann Symphony, lasts only 30 minutes. However, there is significant news for collectors: this release includes the Manfred overture, long held to be lost, and never previously issued, and all the material derives from original broadcast tapes. The transfer on Tahra FURT1088-89, already cited, used a recording made off-air in a studio by an amateur enthusiast.

So, this Manfred sits alongside the live 1949 Berlin performance, and the 1951 Vienna studio inscription for EMI. It's not wholly impeccable in terms of ensemble, even though the conductor had been coming to the Lucerne festival for almost a decade, first performing in 1944 and again in 1947 but it is powerful. Significantly he brought both symphonies on his first visit.

Furtwängler recorded Schumann's Fourth Symphony commercially in Berlin in 1953. As for the Lucerne reading, there is again great power and direction and a sense of a huge organism running throughout. The buoyancy manifests itself in the Lebhaft and the sense of spiritual power that is evoked in the Langsam introduction of the finale is colossal. True there are numerous examples of tempo modifications and some will doubtless prefer greater weight of dynamics to the sense of elasticity Furtwängler indulges in. But the reasons for this level of metrical displacement are clear; this is a sometimes overwhelming reading that conjures up German Romanticism in all its tensile strength and fluid emotionalism.

There are numerous examples of his way with the Eroica. The wind chording is not always unanimous here but otherwise this is an impressive document. His way with the Funeral March is entirely characteristic; from a halting, almost reserved apologetic to an overwhelming climax full of the bleakest foreboding.

There's a good, succinct booklet with tape specifications and numerous photographs - including the orchestra, Furtwängler at play on the beach and at work with his orchestra. The uncredited man on the right-hand side on page 12 is surely Walter Legge.

The question is whether the advance in sound justifies purchase. If you don't want to hear overloading and distortion, especially in the bass frequencies, and at shrill fff in



both symphonies, you will welcome Audite's work with its refinement and spatial depth. One can now appreciate the dynamic gradients in all their considerable glory and without peak distortion.

**Robert SCHUMANN (1810-1856)**

Manfred Overture, Op. 115 (1852) [13:47]

Symphony No. 4 in D minor (1851) [30:39]

**Ludwig van BEETHOVEN (1770-1827)**

Symphony No.3 in E flat, op. 55 *Eroica* (1805) [52:19]

Swiss Festival Orchestra/Wilhelm Furtwängler

rec. live 26 August 1953, Lucerne Kunsthaus

**AUDITE 23.441** [66:10 + 30:39]

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**Jonathan Woolf**