

 LUCERNE FESTIVAL

HISTORIC
PERFORMANCES

audite



Wilhelm Furtwängler

Beethoven Symphony No. 9

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf | Elsa Cavelti

Ernst Haefliger | Otto Edelmann

Lucerne Festival Chorus | Philharmonia Orchestra



Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)
Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op. 125

- I. *Allegro ma non troppo e un poco maestoso* 18:38
- II. *Molto vivace – Presto – Coda* 12:09
- III. *Adagio molto e cantabile – Andante moderato* 19:49
- IV. *Finale. Presto – Allegro assai – Allegro assai vivace (alla Marcia) – Andante maestoso – Adagio ma non troppo ma divoto – Allegro energico e sempre ben marcato – Allegro ma non tanto – Presto – Maestoso – Prestissimo* 25:56

ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF *soprano*
 ELSA CAVELTI *alto*
 ERNST HAEFLIGER *tenor*
 OTTO EDELMANN *bass*
 LUCERNE FESTIVAL CHORUS
 PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
 Wilhelm Furtwängler



Furtwängler's last Ninth. An elemental musical event as a legacy

"An interpretational highlight", "a sonic document of a magic moment": this is how advertising slogans for this live recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with Wilhelm Furtwängler might be worded. Aside from the platitude of such catch-phrases, however, the particular historical significance of this recording, newly re-mastered from the original tapes, would be overlooked – both in view of the history of the festival and in view of the history of interpretation, especially of course the constant and changing aspects of Furtwängler's (very subjective) view of Beethoven's Ninth.

It was Arturo Toscanini who, with his performances in 1938 – the first season of the Internationale Musikfestwochen (IMF), as LUCERNE FESTIVAL was initially called – and the following year, was instrumental in promoting Lucerne's reputation as an important musical city. During the Second World War, however,

he turned his back on Europe. Meanwhile, the festival's initial success encouraged its organisers and an élite of Swiss orchestral musicians to continue the IMF, despite war related difficulties. In 1943, the Swiss Festival Orchestra (SFO) was founded, a formation which was newly assembled each year and who, henceforth, played all orchestral concerts under re-nowned conductors. With a few interruptions, Wilhelm Furtwängler acted as a figurehead in this undertaking: in 1944 he appeared for the first time, conducting two concerts, and from 1947, after his conducting ban had been lifted, he returned each year until his death (with the exception of the 1952 season). In short, Toscanini gave the initial impulse. Furtwängler, on the other hand, who had closer ties to Switzerland than the Italian conductor – after the war, he lived on Lake Geneva, had many Swiss friends and throughout his life appeared with several Swiss orchestras – managed to establish the IMF as one of the then small number of great festivals.

The SFO, via its delegates, was responsible for the festival's artistic planning during these early years, whilst an honorary Lucerne committee was in charge of the organisation. In 1949, this structure bore strains for the first time, for the committee felt that its expertise was disadvantaged with regard to programming. The initial differences in the relationship resulted in veritable disputes, ending in escalation. By the time the mutual mistrust had degenerated into an insuperable barrier in 1954, the management, without further ado, decided to dispense with the SFO and instead engaged the London Philharmonia Orchestra for nine concerts. (The SFO, however, was revived the following year and remained an important pillar of the festival until 1993, when it was finally dissolved.) This circumstance alone awards the year 1954 special status in the long festival history, for the invitation of the London orchestra introduced the annual "parade" of famous guest orchestras which has become a hallmark of LUCERNE FESTIVAL.

Founded in 1945 by Walter Legge initially as a pure recording orchestra, and assembled from the best British musicians, the Philharmonia Orchestra soon achieved great success – not least thanks to the strict training of Herbert von Karajan who, within a very short amount of time, formed a first-class ensemble out of the motley group of players. Engaging the British orchestra, however, faced the Lucerne management with a delicate task, for they now had to manage the difficult relationship between the "pope" Furtwängler and his "anti-pope" Karajan. Not infrequently did the acutely confident Furtwängler react extremely sensitively to criticism; his friendly manner in dealing with colleagues equally often changed into the opposite, escalating into petty jealousies. He observed Karajan's steep rise, including in Lucerne, with suspicion and in a downright embarrassing manner. When both of them, following the "De-Nazification Processes", had become regular guests in Central Switzerland – the festival had invited Karajan for the first

time in 1948, thus enabling his return to the international stage – Furtwängler, with some diplomatic aptitude and as a symbol of exclusive appreciation, was granted two concerts and a remarkable fee. This tradition seemed to be doomed when the Philharmonia Orchestra was booked, since the musicians wished to perform two concerts with their chief conductor Karajan – which would inevitably have resulted in Furtwängler cancelling. Thus trench warfare also took over the management: according to the minutes, one party accused Karajan of cunning tactics, warning and fearing that Furtwängler would be sacrificed, whilst the other party argued that Furtwängler was an ill man and Karajan the conductor of the future. In the end, a solution was found. As Guido Cantelli was unable to accept his invitation to Lucerne, Karajan was granted two performances as his "replacement". One of the two Furtwängler concerts was programmed twice so that he would have three performances in total, thus one more than his antipode. It was Beethoven's Ninth Symphony that



Furtwängler interpreted twice, on 21 and 22 August 1954. Three days later, he also conducted the closing concert featuring symphonies by Haydn and Bruckner. The remaining programmes of this first appearance by the Philharmonia Orchestra were directed by André Cluytens, Edwin Fischer (from the piano), Ferenc Fricsay and Rafael Kubelík.

Furtwängler had already programmed Beethoven's Ninth in 1948 at Lucerne (this concert sadly was not recorded by Swiss Radio). With his final interpretation in 1954, he created another artistic and intellectual peak of the festival. The press agreed – in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, Willi Reich wrote that “both evenings were the artistic *pièce de résistance* of the festival”; the Lucerne *Vaterland* commented that the festival had received a “prestigious crown”; and Richard Rosenberg reported in the *Luzerner Tagblatt* that “communicated like this, Beethoven's sounds of joy resulted in a joyful storm amongst the audience”. One last time, the concertgoers experienced the unique, mysterious

atmosphere which Furtwängler concerts, incomparably, created and of which contemporary witnesses rave to the present day.

According to Herbert Haffner, Furtwängler's last performance of Beethoven's Ninth was also his 103rd! Towards the end of September 1954, his hearing began to wane alarmingly; in mid-November he also contracted bronchial pneumonia. A doctor gave up hope and noted that Furtwängler had “become possessed by the fear that he was going towards the same fate as Beethoven ... In this deep depression, he had contracted an acute illness which might have been managed if the patient had not given up on himself. I am convinced that a doctor cannot help a patient whose will to live has faded” (Herbert Haffner: *Furtwängler*, 2003). Furtwängler died on 30 November.

His death and Toscanini's demise three years later marked the end of an artistic era within the conductors' guild, and also for Lucerne. A legend, even during his lifetime, as a reputed conjuror of irretrievably

bygone times, and as an anti-perfectionist who was aware of the effect of his personality and his musical persuasiveness, used to “ecstatic glances from musicians and audience” (Peter Gülke), Furtwängler had his reservations about LP recordings. He did not like the sterile atmosphere of the studio. On top of that, the strategy of the record mogul Legge (*His Master's Voice* / EMI), to whom he was contractually bound, incurred his displeasure, since the latter promoted his antipode Karajan. Around a dozen recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under Furtwängler survive, though not one of them is a studio recording. Two live recordings are still regarded as reference recordings: the notorious, energetic Berlin performance which Furtwängler conducted in 1942 in front of assembled leading Nazis, and that of 1951, re-opening the Bayreuth Festival.

Those who listen to the Lucerne interpretation and compare it to these two or other recordings will come to their own conclusions. Here, only a few elements will be pointed out which characterise Furt-

wängler's last performance of the Ninth. Generally speaking, its (very broad) tempos differ only marginally from the Bayreuth version; in Lucerne, Furtwängler took only seconds longer, whereas his pace in Berlin was more extreme, meaning that for the third movement, he chose an even slower speed, and for the other movements a slightly faster tempo. Despite these differences, which are only relevant to bean counters, the conductor remains true to himself and his approach. In his essay *Der Erwählte* [The chosen one], Peter Gülke made most pertinent comments concerning the essence of Furtwängler's interpretation of the Ninth which are based on the 1942 performance but which do not lose their validity for his later performances. For instance, when he observes that the first movement is subjected to “overpressure which almost tears the structure apart; the falls occur with great momentum, as though they were pulling the music into a void; the dimension of the crescendos appears precariously increased”. The *tutti*s, as



Gülke continues, resemble “catastrophic concentrations”, with Furtwängler changing “tempos in order to emphasise the details” and creating “an acute sense of pungency in the Scherzo, as well as rhythmic insistence”. The Adagio, on the other hand (half the speed of Beethoven’s metronome marking!), “hardly dares to come out”, almost “falling silent, positioning and singing each note as though it was to sound for the last time”. Lastly, the finale resembles an “overwrought sense of paranoia”, reaching a borderline situation; questioning its legitimacy, however, would be subaltern and thus obsolete.

The reviewers of the Lucerne performance observed similar characteristics. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* attested “ideal ensemble” within the Philharmonia, “particularly in the rhythmically taut passages – in the entire Scherzo and in the fugal stretto of the finale”, but also noted: “At other points, the orchestra’s reaction to the free, sometimes seemingly improvisatory (though of course emanating from an exact artistic conception) interpre-

tation of Furtwängler appeared to be gradual, resulting in some hesitation [...] at certain entries.” The critic even nominates concrete “musical high points” of the performance – “the solemn brass entry at the beginning of the development of the first movement, accentuated with unparalleled momentousness; the demonic powers of the Scherzo; the glorious gasp of relief from the strings in the first two bars of the Adagio; the wonderfully idiomatic recitative of the cellos and double basses in the fourth movement and the [...] first entry of the full *Ode to Joy* in the strings. This experience is associated with the first encounter with Furtwängler thirty-five years ago in Vienna; then as now we perceived the [...] completely dematerialised sound [...] as an elemental musical event.” The *Luzerner Tagblatt* wrote that the performance owed its “urgency and also its comprehensibility” not least to the “drastic emphasis of the melodic essence, as demanded already by Wagner”. And in the *Luzerner Neuste Nachrichten* Paul Alfred Sarasin enthused how Furtwängler knew

“how to create tension with incredibly dynamic nuancing, preparing outbursts”. “It was not sweeping, but stirring”, the *Vaterland* concluded – and rightly so.

Another comment about the other performers, for the choir and soloists of course made a major contribution to the high level of the performance. The Lucerne Festival Chorus, newly assembled from amateurs each summer from 1939 until the turn of the millennium, had already sung under Furtwängler between 1947 and 1950 (rehearsed by the Lucerne composer and choral conductor Albert Jenny), and also at his afore-mentioned first Lucerne performance of the Ninth in the summer of 1948. With the exception of the Austrian bass Otto Edelmann (who had become legendary in the role of Baron Ochs von Lerchenau in *Der Rosenkavalier*), the soloists, all regular guests at Lucerne, had also taken part in that first performance of the Ninth: the tenor Ernst Haefliger, whose appearances as Evangelist in Bach's passions remain unforgettable; the soprano Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Walter Legge's

wife; and the Swiss mezzosoprano Elsa Cavelti, an uncompromising singer who made high demands of herself and those around her, and who was promoted in Germany until the post-war era, after the musical institutions of her home country had failed to recognise her talent. Schwarzkopf and Edelmann also formed part of the quartet of soloists for Furtwängler's Bayreuth performance of the Ninth in 1951.

Erich Singer
Translation: Viola Scheffel

LUCERNE FESTIVAL Historic Performances

In cooperation with audite, LUCERNE FESTIVAL is presenting outstanding concert recordings of the work of artists who have shaped the Festival throughout its history. The aim of this edition is to retrieve treasures – for the most part previously unreleased – from the first six decades of the Festival, which was founded in 1938 with a special gala concert led by Arturo Toscanini. These recordings come from the archives of Schweizer Radio und Fernsehen (SRF), which, from the outset, has regularly broadcast the performances from Lucerne. Carefully remastered and supplemented with materials and photos from the LUCERNE FESTIVAL archive, they represent a history of the Festival in sound.





recording: live recording at LUCERNE FESTIVAL (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)



recording date: 22 August 1954
recording location: Kunsthhaus, Lucerne

remastering: © Ludger Böckenhoff, 2014

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The historical publications at audite are based, without exception, on the original tapes from broadcasting archives. In general these are the original analogue tapes, which attain an astonishingly high quality, even measured by today's standards, with their tape speed of up to 76 cm/sec. The remastering – professionally competent and sensitively applied – also uncovers previously hidden details of the interpretations. Thus, a sound of superior quality results. Publications based on private recordings from broadcasts cannot be compared with these.

photos: Cover: Wilhelm Furtwängler © IMAGNO / Votava

© Archive LUCERNE FESTIVAL: ① Wilhelm Furtwängler rehearsing with the Swiss Festival Orchestra / Hans Blättler | ② Wilhelm Furtwängler signing autographs / Jean Schneider | ③ Wilhelm Furtwängler in Lucerne / Paul Weber | ④ Wilhelm Furtwängler signing autographs / Jean Schneider | ⑤ + ⑥ Wilhelm Furtwängler in rehearsal / Gerold Züst

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VI. SYMPHONIE-KONZERT

Kunsthhaus

Samstag, 21. August 1954, 19.30 Uhr

Sonntag, 22. August 1954, 19.30 Uhr

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA LONDON

FESTWOCHENCHOR LUZERN

(einstudiert von Albert Jenny)

Leitung: WILHELM FURTWÄGLER

Solisten: ELISABETH SCHWARZKOPF Sopran

ELSA CAVELTI Alt

ERNST HÄFLIGER Tenor

OTTO EDELMANN Bass

Programm

Ludwig van Beethoven: IX. Symphonie d-moll, op. 125
mit Schlusschor über Schillers
«Ode an die Freude»

Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso
Molto vivace
Adagio molto e cantabile
Finale

Elisabeth Schwarzkopf



Elsa Cavelti



Ernst Häfliger



Otto Edelmann