



LUCERNE FESTIVAL

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# Wilhelm Furtwängler

Schumann *Manfred* Overture | Symphony No. 4  
Beethoven Symphony No. 3 *Eroica*

Swiss Festival Orchestra

Robert Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

*Manfred Overture*, Op. 115\* 13:47

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827)

*Symphony No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 55 Eroica*

I. *Allegro con brio* 16:24

II. *Marcia funebre. Adagio assai* 16:31

III. *Scherzo. Allegro vivace* 6:38

IV. *Finale. Allegro molto* 12:46

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

*Symphony No. 4 in D minor, Op. 120*

I. *Ziemlich langsam – Lebhaft* – 11:32

II. *Romanze. Ziemlich langsam* – 4:55

III. *Scherzo. Lebhaft* – 5:41

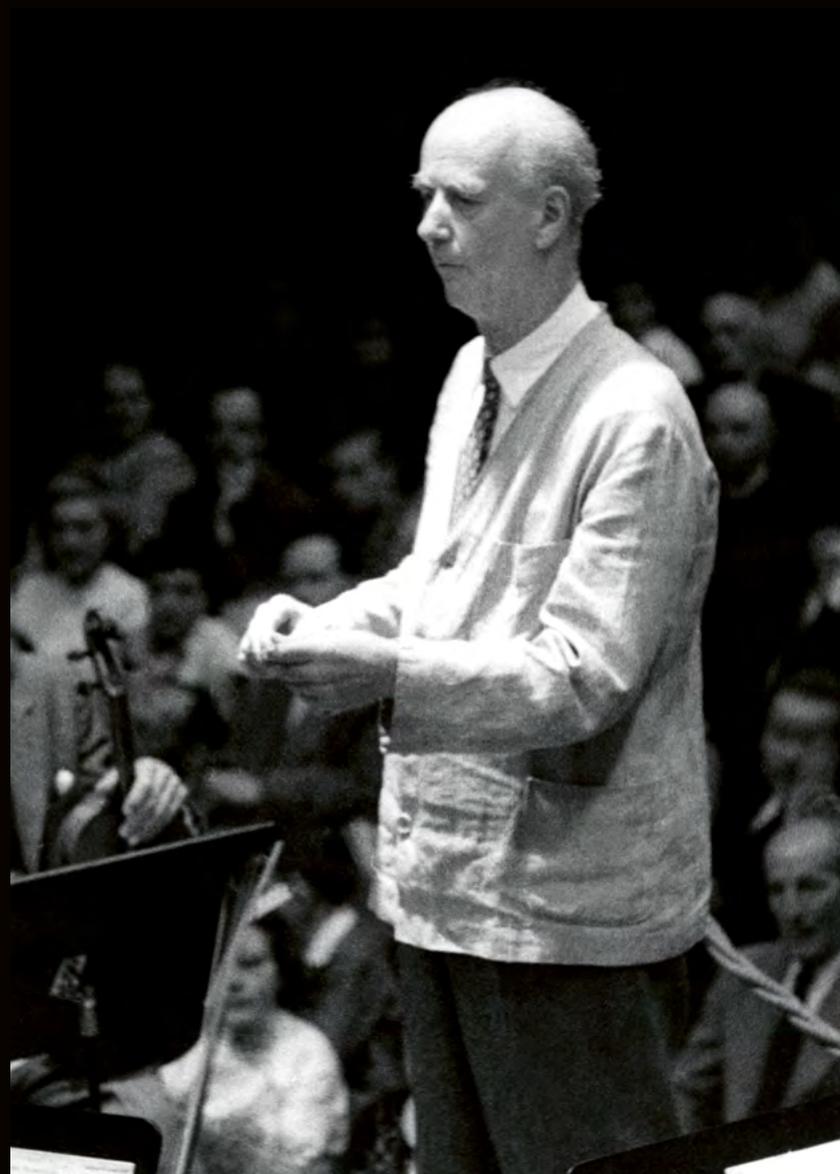
IV. *Etwas zurückhaltend – Langsam – Lebhaft – Presto* 8:18

Swiss Festival Orchestra | **Wilhelm Furtwängler**

recorded live at LUCERNE FESTIVAL

(Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)

First release using original tapes | \*previously unreleased





### Always considering the big picture

#### Wilhelm Furtwängler conducts Beethoven and Schumann

In March 1814, Beethoven explained in a letter to Georg Friedrich Treitschke, the librettist of *Fidelio*, that in his “instrumental music” he always considered “the big picture”. No sentence describes more accurately the effect that Wilhelm Furtwängler’s recordings still have today. As did Beethoven, Furtwängler always strove towards bringing “the ‘vision’ of that big picture, which originally governed the creator, back into focus”: that is to say, to convey the unity of the work in the diversity of its facets. In order to depict them, according to Furtwängler, “the logic of feeling [...] is as inescapable as the logic of thought”.

The anti-perfectionist and “great committer out of conviction” took a decidedly sceptical stance against sound recordings, and out of his many studio recordings he really only accepted the recording of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*. In his essay *Über Konzert-Programme* of 1930, Furtwängler wrote that music “does not want to be grasped, overseen or classified in its historical context, but it wants to be experienced.” For posterity, a compromise exists in the form of his countless live recordings. From key works of his repertoire such as Beethoven’s Third, Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, Schubert’s *Unfinished* or Brahms’ First Symphony, more than ten recordings of each survive and are available. They capture the moment of the experience, transcending it at the same time. They allow us to witness the process of its genesis, and they also correct a central prejudice circulating about Furtwängler – this will be revisited at a later stage.

Furtwängler made his debut at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, today’s LUCERNE FESTIVAL, in 1944, conducting two concerts with the Swiss Festival Orchestra: even at that stage, he programmed Beethoven’s *Eroica* and Schumann’s Fourth Symphony. Initially, there were no return invitations. After his last public conducting engagements in Hitler’s Germany on 23 and 28 January 1945 in Berlin and Vienna, Furtwängler evaded being drafted into the so-called “Volkssturm” (the territorial army raised at the end of the war) by travelling, at the invitation of Ernest Ansermet, to Switzerland on 7 February 1945. Political protests against his concerts in Zurich and Winterthur in February 1945 and post-war discussions about his role in Nazi Germany prevented further appearances for several years, not only in Germany but also in Switzerland. It was not until August 1947 that he conducted the Swiss Festival Orchestra again, after which he returned to Lucerne each summer – with the exception of 1952 when he was forced to cancel due to illness – until 1954. This was not without its tensions – not in relation to his work with the festival orchestra, but due to the situation with his rival, Herbert von Karajan, whom Furtwängler did not want to tolerate alongside himself and whose com-



mitment to the same podium was a continual source of vexation to Furtwängler. His hope therefore that the “Lucerne Festwochen might establish a sort of Furtwängler tradition” was not fulfilled.

Furtwängler conducted eighteen concerts at Lucerne in total – sixteen with the Swiss Festival Orchestra and the final two, in 1954, with the Philharmonia Orchestra, appearing at that festival as the “house orchestra”. Friction between the festival committee and the Swiss Music Association (Schweizer Musikverband – SMV), responsible for the artistic management of the festival orchestra, which, since 1943, had been assembled from members of the leading Swiss orchestras, had led to this long-standing tradition being interrupted in 1954. In 1955, however, it was reinstated and maintained until 1993. In 1953, the concert master was a young Michel Schwalbé whom Karajan was to engage for the Berlin Philharmonic in 1957. The actual collaboration between orchestra and conductor remained unaffected by these organisational tensions. Indeed, in a letter of thanks to Rudolf Leuzinger, the director of the SMV, the conductor explicitly mentions “the accomplishments of individual musicians”, especially “the beautiful tone and sensitivity of the overall ensemble”: “Added to this is the human atmosphere and joyful dedication of all involved in the joint endeavour, helping to impart a celebratory character to these performances. I will remember them as particularly artistic occasions.”

Following Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony in a live recording made in the summer of 1954, already released as part of the “Historic Performances” series (audite 95.641), this double album now presents Furtwängler’s final performance with the Swiss Festival Orchestra on 26 August 1953. The concert recording, previously edited multiple times, is now available for the first time using the recovered original radio tapes, providing a much better sound quality than the previously utilised private recording made with a Revox tape recorder. And, for the first time, it is released in its entirety, i.e. including the previously missing, and presumed lost, recording of Robert Schumann’s *Manfred* Overture which had opened the concert.

The programme is characteristic of the mature Furtwängler, who increasingly saw himself as a preserver of the classical and romantic heritage and thus a German tradition of music-making. Well over one thousand Beethoven performances and over five hundred Brahms performances also provide statistical support for these preferences. Schumann, however, “only” featured 190 times in Furtwängler’s concert programmes, comprising ninety renditions of the Fourth Symphony. Of all Schumann’s orchestral works, it and the darkly melancholy soul picture of the *Manfred* Overture correspond most with Beethoven’s philosophical ideals in music and his concept of “per aspera ad astra”. Furtwängler brought them closer to these ideals.



A few weeks before the Lucerne performance, on 14 May 1953, Furtwängler had recorded Schumann's Fourth in the studio with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. In their Schumann discography, Harald Eggebrecht and Dietmar Holland rated this recording as "significant, but strange, comprehensible in its historical substance, and yet oddly mistaken". Presumably, the work had never been played in this way. Its gloomy seriousness, whose precipitous abysses are only closed in the finale, seems almost "monumentalised" (Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen) in Furtwängler's interpretation. Despite minor technical weaknesses from the players and, at times, slightly more sweeping dynamics, similar things could be said about the Lucerne recording. A sense of pathos and subjectivity in the approach, manifesting themselves mainly in the fluctuating tempo relations and Furtwängler's signature rubati, cannot be missed. Nevertheless, these two recordings do not substantiate the claims of arbitrary subjectivity, of which Furtwängler was accused repeatedly. His motto was to be "faithful to the spirit" rather than "faithful to each note": he insisted on this concept both in his writings and in conversations.

In his analysis of Furtwängler's reading of Schumann's Fourth Symphony, Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen has shown – examining the sheet music used for both the Berlin studio recording and the Lucerne concert performance, which survives as part of the Furtwängler estate, preserved at the Zurich Central Library – the conductor's meticulous and methodical approach to the music. Diluting the main tempo, especially in the two outer movements, proves more consequential than delicately retouching the instrumentation in order to brighten up the texture.

At first glance, these tempo modifications appear to be improvisatory and arbitrary. However in reality, according to Hinrichsen, varying the tempo signifies a "dynamic process of tremendous intensity, taking place during the entire work": a deliberate "tempo architecture" (Hinrichsen) which emphasises the agogic nuances at least to the same extent as the processual, "the structural element of the works" (Wilhelm Furtwängler, *Interpretation – eine musikalische Schicksalsfrage*, 1934). Furtwängler treats the tempo relations of the outer movements in strict analogy, using "Schumann's finalised version of the closing section [...] as the core concept of the work which he consistently pursued from the beginning" (Hinrichsen). It is therefore no coincidence that on both recordings – the Lucerne concert recording and the studio recording which was made in a single take, thus coming very close to concert conditions – the durations of the respective movements are only seconds apart. In both cases – according to Hinrichsen, who appears not to be familiar with the Lucerne recording, as he does not include it in his considerations – we have an "extremely precisely considered interpretation".

The Lucerne concert recording of Beethoven's Third Symphony, the *Eroica*, conveys a similar impression. Once again it becomes apparent that the tempo relations in the



opening movement, especially the drastic rubati, hold structural significance, modelling Beethoven's deliberately dramatic treatment of the musical form. At the first statement of the elegiac secondary theme in E minor, for instance, Furtwängler noticeably moderates the tempo – a procedure which is repeated with every further statement. When the main theme appears, however, he invariably and abruptly accelerates the tempo, as he generally does for dramatic accents (not only in the coda), whilst also overproportionately increasing the dynamics. Listening to the second movement in its strict “walking” march tempo, the impression of a distressing, oppressive situation manifests itself – as for instance in the military trumpet signals calling the dead, or in the main theme's anaemic fading into the distance during the final bars, to name but two details. But here as well the charismatic *espressivo* musician Furtwängler emphatically conveys the “emotional situation” whilst divulging the logical structure of the movement.

The consistency, i.e. the precise calculation, of his interpretation over the years of this revolutionary, enlightened intellectual masterpiece becomes apparent when one compares the Lucerne recording to the first surviving recording of the *Eroica* from 16 December 1944 with the Vienna Philharmonic at the Musikverein. Once again, the movements each have almost the same duration and the tempi and their relations are nearly all analogous. The distinguishing feature of this performance (as well as that of Brahms' Second Symphony from 28 January 1945, made at the same venue) is the historical moment of the situation: consciously countering the demise of the external world during the final weeks of the war with a utopia of an inner world. “It is all spirit and fire – as though everything positive was to be summarised in great desperation one last time before the disaster” (Michael Gielen). Naturally, this particular intensity – in light of the immediate threat and proximity of death – is not reflected in the Lucerne concert which took place nearly a decade later, and on safe Swiss ground.

Furtwängler was no “arbitrary genius”, no “conceited subjectivist” – attitudes of the time which he emphatically rejected. For him, it was about salvation: saving works from disintegration, “saving something already lost” by “winning back, through performance, what was beginning to vanish from the moment in which previously binding traditions began to fade away. This salvaging feature gave him something of the extreme effort of an entreaty which has already begun to lose sight of what it is searching” (Theodor W. Adorno). The unsettlingly topical presence of his music-making resides to no small degree within this very quality.

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 LUCERNE FESTIVAL

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



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recording date: August 26, 1953

recording location: Kunsthhaus, Lucerne

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p. 3: Wilhelm Furtwängler during rehearsal in Lucerne | p. 6: Wilhelm Furtwängler at the beach of Lake Lucerne | p. 5: Wilhelm Furtwängler in front of the old Kunsthhaus, with Yehudi Menuhin and Rudolf Leuzinger

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p. 2: Wilhelm Furtwängler in rehearsal / Gerold Züst | p. 4: Wilhelm Furtwängler in concert | p. 8: Wilhelm Furtwängler rehearsing with the Swiss Festival Orchestra / Jean Schneider | p. 7: Wilhelm Furtwängler: signing session / Jean Schneider

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