

Great Conductors of The 20th Century Vol. 40 - Wilhelm Furtwängler



CD1 Beethoven: Symphony No.3 'Eroica' 1 I *Allegro con brio* 2 II *Marcia Funebre. Adagio Assai* 3 III *Scherzo. Allegro Vivace* 4 IV *Finale. Allegro Molto*
Beethoven: Symphony No.9 'Choral' (beginning)
5 I *Allegro Ma Non Troppo, Un Poco Maestoso* 6 II *Molto Vivace*
Wiener Philharmoniker (1-4) Berliner Philharmoniker (5-6) CD2 Beethoven: Symphony No.9 'Choral' (conclusion) (with Erna Berger, Gertrude Pitzinger, Walther Ludwig & Rudolf Watzke)
1 III *Adagio Molto E Cantabile See All 2* 2 IV *Presto See All 4* 3 *Rezitativo: 'O Freunde, Nicht Diese Töne!'*
Beethoven: Symphony No.5
4 I *Allegro con brio See All 9* 5 II *Andante Con Moto See All 8* 6 III *Allegro See All 3* 7 IV *Allegro*
Philharmonischer Chor Berlin (1-3) Berliner Philharmoniker (1-7) Wilhelm Furtwängler – conductor

Wilhelm Furtwängler was born in Berlin in 1886, the eldest son of the leading archaeologist of his time and of a painter. His musical gifts were apparent early, and he was educated by private tutors, often while travelling in Greece, Italy and Egypt. He began composing as soon as he could play the piano, and always regarded himself as primarily a composer, though one who was waylaid by conducting. Furtwängler was, in a conscious way, the successor to the German Idealist philosophers and the great line of Classical composers, and also to Wagner. He rapidly achieved fame and became chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic on the death of Arthur Nikisch in 1922. This remained the orchestra with which he was most closely associated, though his links with the Vienna Philharmonic were also strong, and he conducted many other orchestras in Europe and the Americas. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, Furtwängler was torn between his allegiance to the great humanist tradition he represented (and felt that he should maintain), and his abhorrence of the racist-cultural policies of the Nazis. There were angry confrontations, but in the end he stayed in Germany, and this decision gave rise to great hostility towards him, especially in the USA. He spent his last years living in Switzerland, but touring in many countries, and died exhausted in November 1954. His posthumous reputation and influence has grown ever larger in the intervening decades.

Though Furtwängler had intense feelings for the whole mainstream German tradition, including Wagner, his hero was Beethoven. As Michael Tanner explains in the essay accompanying this set: 'The element of titanic struggle in Beethoven's work, the aspiration to overcome all manner of obstacles by dint of the heroic will, and the achievement of ecstasy, exaltation and ultimate serenity, were what Furtwängler was supremely concerned with and what led him to perform Beethoven's symphonies far more often than any other works.' Of the nine symphonies, the Fifth is the one he conducted most during his career (and there are no fewer than eleven versions available on record, from 1926 [his first ever recording] to 1954). The hitherto unissued live performance in this compilation dates from the darkest days of the Second World War and at a concert that had to take place in the State Opera House (because by then the Berlin Philharmonic's concert hall had been bombed by the Allies). Furtwängler tended to perform the 'Eroica' and 'Choral' symphonies less often and to hold them in reserve for particular occasions. The occasion for this previously unreleased 'Eroica' was a concert given by the Vienna Philharmonic in Munich, between visits to the Salzburg and Edinburgh Festivals in September 1953, and the 'Choral' Symphony was performed at the first of two concerts by the Berlin Philharmonic in London, prior to a Wagner Ring cycle conducted by Furtwängler at Covent Garden in May 1937.

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