



Edition Wilhelm Furtwängler – The complete RIAS recordings

aud 21.403

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More than half a century has passed since the death of Wilhelm Furtwängler who was, as the saying goes, a legend in his own lifetime. His reputation around the world up to the early post WW2 years rested on word-of-mouth and the still incomparable HMV recordings with The Berlin Philharmonic of the Beethoven Fifth (1937), Music from Parsifal and Tristan (1938), and the Tchaikovsky Sixth (1939). Following the war his recordings, mainly with the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics and the Philharmonia Orchestra, elicited critical acclaim and live on in CD catalogues. The recordings that exist of his concert performances are more representative of the energy and uniqueness of his interpretations than those from the studio. From 1947 until 1954 many of his concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic were heard on the RIAS, originating from the Titania-Palast in Berlin. AUDITE has acquired the original master tapes from Deutschlandradio and after expert remastering has issued 31 of these priceless (in the artistic sense) performances on a 12 CD set (Audite 21.403) together with a 13th disc of a 1951 colloquium, in German, with Furtwängler answering questions posed by an informed audience who all seem to be having a good time. As might be expected, there are some duplications of repertoire: from Beethoven two Eroicas, two Fifths and two Pastorales, along with two Brahms Thirds. The Bruckner Eighth from 15 March 1949 might seem to be a mislabelling of the 14 March 1949 performance on Testament (SBT1143). They are, in fact, different performances from different venues. The Testament is from The Gemeindehaus, Dahlem. They also offer quite a different sound picture. The Testament sounds less weighty and more detailed, the Audite is more opulent and ambient, a quality that characterises the sound on each of these 12 new discs. As expected, these are unashamedly Romantic performances of Mendelssohn, Beethoven including the violin concerto with Menuhin, Bach, Schubert, the Fortner violin concerto (Gerhard Taschner), Wagner, Hindemith, Gluck, Händel and Weber. Anachronistic? As there are no absolutes in interpretation, who's to say? These are organic performances that delve deeper into the various scores than is fashionable today. There is no shortage of Furtwängler CDs but these are unique in that, taken from the master tapes, we hear exactly what was fresh then. I found every performance, excepting Schumann's Manfred Overture, to be quite intoxicating. In the film "Taking Sides", expanded from the stage play about Furtwängler's de-Nazification, author Ronald Harwood has Furtwängler commenting on a live performance of a Schubert string quintet, "The tempos were a little too correct for my taste." "What does he mean 'too correct?'" asks someone. "I don't know," was the reply. We know.