

Comment from DAVID HAMILTON

In my review of the Fonoteam Hamburg's Furtwängler/Wagner box (Acanta 40.23520), in ARSC Journal XV/2-3, pp. 98ff., I wrote of some orchestral excerpts that "I wouldn't be surprised if they turned out to be authentic." John W. N. Francis, of Fanfare, has reported to me--and I was quickly able to confirm--that these are indeed "authentic," at least in the sense that they are really conducted by Furtwängler. However, rather than newly discovered performances, no fewer than five orchestral items in that set are actually identical to familiar and widely-available Furtwängler recordings. On the watch for such subtler fictions as the "creative" reattribution of non-commercial, relatively unfamiliar recordings, I obviously neglected my own reminder that, after all, an earlier forgery had tried to pass off as a long-lost Bayreuth performance one of the best-known of all Wagnerian recordings, Frieda Leider's studio version of the "Imolation Scene." Here are the details:

1) The Tristan Prelude, attributed to the Bayreuth Festival of 1931, is actually the 1937 HMV recording by the Berlin Philharmonic, with an audience-noise track overlaid (at least in the quiet passages at the beginning and end), some "creative" editing of the rests (perhaps to mislead reviewers who compare timings or do synchronized playbacks), and a severe diminution of bass. This fraud was originally floated in BASF's 1976 Bayreuth centenary box (HB-22863) and seems to have escaped general suspicion--perhaps because it was known (from Olsen's discography, No. 21) that the Prelude had been recorded by the German Radio at the Bayreuth performance of August 18, 1931, and because the audience noises at the beginning proved an effective red herring. The "treatment" applied to this recording indicates an intent to mislead; this is not simply a matter of mislabeling. Perhaps this initial success inspired the remaining frauds, found for the first time (as far as I know) in the Acanta box.

2) The Parsifal Prelude (billed as "Staatskapelle Berlin, aufgenommen 1940") is a similar transformation of the 1938 HMV Berlin Philharmonic studio recording.

3) The Tannhäuser Overture ("Orchester der Staatsoper Berlin, aufgenommen 1940") is the 1952 Vienna Philharmonic recording.

4) The "Zwischenaktmusik" from Siegfried (Staatskapelle Berlin, Aufgenommen 1940") is taken from the 1953 RAI Ring cycle.

5) The "Rhine Journey" from Götterdämmerung (Staatskapelle Berlin, Aufgenommene 1940") comes from the 1950 Scala Ring.

It seems, then, that my reservations about the credibility of Fonoteam attributions were only too well founded. Perhaps these guys are innocent victims--but somewhere out there a T. J. Wise is at large in the field of Wagnerian recordings. I submit that everything from Fonoteam and related firms should be subjected to the closest scrutiny.

Further to the same set: the scenes from the 1947 Berlin Tristan performance have since appeared in more complete form, in Fonit-Cetra's Furtwängler Edition (FE-43, three discs). From Act II, there is the opening sequence as in Acanta, and then the performance picks up with Tristan's entrance and continues through to the end of the act (less the traditional "Big Cut" in the first part of the love duet). After the Act III Prelude, as in Acanta, we skip to "Dünk dich das," but the Cetra version is then complete to the end of the opera. Erna Schlüter is no more satisfactory than before, but the more extensive documentation of this otherwise imposing and highly individual performance is most welcome. On the sixth side of the set is a Prelude and Liebestod with the RAI (Turin) Orchestra from March 11, 1952 (Olsen 297/8; not previously issued, to my knowledge).