

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of reissues and archive recordings

Major maestros revisited

An indispensable archive collection and the provocative bag lady of Russian pianists

Regular *Gramophone* readers will by now have cottoned on to what I've occasionally thought of as a "Furtwängler Industry" – the relentless recycling of familiar recorded material by a plethora of labels. But a new 12-CD collection from Audite is rather more than mere recycling: this handsomely produced and intelligently annotated collection calls on the archives of RIAS ("Radio in the American Sector") and offers what amounts to the archive's complete Furtwängler legacy, transferred from the original mastertapes which means, often for the first time on CD, optimum sound quality. Furtwängler "first-timers" may be perplexed by a number of repertoire duplications – Beethoven's Symphonies Nos 3, 5 and 6 and Brahms's Third are all offered in two separate recordings, yet the differences between them, although far from radical (except perhaps in the Brahms) are significant enough to warrant study, principally for the subtle contrasts that Furtwängler achieves through tiny alterations in pulse and emphasis. One good example is the opening of Brahms's Third, which goes off like rocket in 1949 whereas the performance from April 1954 is noticeably less combustible (especially in the finale; also there was no first movement repeat in 1954). Another interesting comparison is between the two recordings of the *Eroica*, the first from June 1950, the second from December 1952 where the Funeral March second movement is broader than its predecessor by almost one and a half minutes. A Bruckner Eighth from March 15, 1949, enjoys a higher voltage-level than on the broadcast performance from a day earlier (not included in the set), though some listeners may find the bronchial audience irksome.

Other highlights include two works by Paul Hindemith, the *Concerto for Orchestra* and the Symphony *Die Harmonie der Welt*, which remind us of tumultuous times in pre-war Berlin. While Furtwängler's performances lack polish, a degree of warmth and energy more than compensates. You can hear Fortner's Violin Concerto (Gerhard Taschner) and Blacher's *Concertante Musik* while gargantuan Baroque is represented by Bach's Third Suite and Handel's Op 6 No 5 – stylistically inauthentic but authentically "felt". Among the many other significant items are memorable, typically free-spirited renditions of Beethoven's Violin Concerto (Yehudi Menuhin), Schubert's Symphonies Nos 8 and 9, Brahms's Fourth, Strauss's *Don Juan* and orchestral excerpts from Wagner operas. A bonus disc allows us to hear Furtwängler in (German) dialogue with what I presume is a group of music journalists, the range of topics covered mostly concerned with repertoire and interpretation. Clearer-than-ever sound, including the odd distant Dakota flying overhead, is another bonus. If ever a set warranted the hackneyed if useful accolade "Essential Furtwängler", this is it.

The third volume of Naxos's series "Furtwängler: The Early Recordings" includes at least one indisputable classic, a sleek and moody *Hebrides* Overture from 1930, the less memorable couplings, all with the Berlin Phil, Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture (plus the three popular "incidental" movements conducted by Erich Kleiber) and pieces by Weber and Berlioz. Filling in at the Philharmonic while Furtwängler was being denazified was Romanian-born *Sergiu Celibidache*, always a controversial interpreter and never more so than on March 28, 1958, in Turin when he conducted a mostly magisterial Beethoven Ninth, save for the *Scherzo's* Trio which flies past at a tremendous lick, very much the world



of the late quartets...and an interpretative option that I've only ever heard in recent years (as convincingly conducted – and argued – by Benjamin Zander). The soloists singing alongside the RAI Symphony Orchestra and Chorus are Bruna Rizzoli, Marga Hoeffgen, Petre Monteanu and Aureliano Neagu.

Stokowski fans are well served by Pristine Audio who have coupled two fascinating

and rarely heard Prokofiev symphony recordings, a characterful, emphatically stated 1958 Fifth with the USSR Radio Symphony Orchestra (the *Scherzo* a highly eventful box of tricks) and a very early New York broadcast recording (1949) of the Sixth where the first movement's tragic centre is taken at an usually fast pace though the work's visceral impact still registers. Hanssler Classic's Stokowski double-pack consists of '50s performances with orchestras in Stuttgart and Baden-Baden, the repertoire, most interestingly Prokofiev's Third *Romeo & Juliet* Suite, Boris Blacher's *Paganini* Variations and Werner Egk's French Suite "after Rameau" – all Baden-Baden; the highlight of the second (Stuttgart) CD is an especially menacing account of the Intermezzo from Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina* coupled with an impassioned *Tristan* Prelude und Liebestod and one of the less impressive of Stok's many Tchaikovsky Fiftths. Well worth having, though, and the sound is more than acceptable.

Returning to Prokofiev's Sixth, in 1951 Ernest Ansermet recorded the work in Geneva, capturing the full measure of its starkness and drama. Universal Music Australia have just reissued this fascinating performance in one of two all-Prokofiev "doubles", the works, the Fifth Symphony (equally transparent and thought-through) and two quite different recordings of the First: one with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra (1953), the other with the Suisse Romande (1961). Just compare the opening's first couple of minutes, especially the second subject, which is pointed to perfection in Paris, whereas the Geneva performance is heavier, more laconic – but what a brilliant idea to give us both. The other Ansermet/Prokofiev double-pack includes persuasive performances of music from *Romeo & Juliet*, *Cinderella*, *The Prodigal Son* and *The Love for Three Oranges*, plus a superb *Scythian Suite*.

The Recordings

- **Various Cpsrs** Cpte RIAS Recordings **Furtwängler**
Audite © © AUDITE21 403
- **Mendelssohn** Hebrides, etc **Furtwängler**
Naxos © 8 111004
- **Beethoven** Sym no 9 **Celibidache**
Archipel © ARPCD0412
- **Prokofiev** Syms Nos 5 & 6 **Stokowski**
Pristine © PASC161
- **Prokofiev, et al** Orch Wks **Stokowski**
Hanssler © © CD94 204
- **Prokofiev** Syms Nos 1 & 5 **Ansermet**
Decca Eloquence © © 480 0834
- **Prokofiev** Ballet Wks **Ansermet**
Decca Eloquence © © 480 0830