

Richard Wagner was unique among the great composers in many ways. This disc is aimed at emphasizing some of those properties of his works which can be recognized more easily in a synoptic view - one in which all the materials are present at the same time. Thus, it becomes possible to trace his development of the mythic hero by listening to comparable segments over his entire body of work instead of searching among many discs and disparate libretti.

We have not chosen to define the ways in which such studies may be undertaken. This volume is intended to be a reference from which many 'lessons' can be assembled. In addition, we hope that the performances are enjoyable in themselves and that they will assist the student and the researcher in discovering features of Wagner's operas considered as a body of work rather than as a collection of disparate achievements.

Selection of performances for this disc was difficult and many of the choices may be argued. The criteria included quality of interpretation, availability from other sources and sonic values. Singing per se was not a primary consideration, except in that some very poor readings were excluded. For example, selecting a Ring entailed finding one recorded in good but not exemplary sound so that the losses in this format would not be painful; one not on the shelves already; one with an honest and straightforward interpretation of the score; and one which offered artists of merit who could be heard to advantage on few other recordings. While Sawallisch has issued a later traversal of the Ring on video, in the opinion of many his interpretation and his performers' achievements in this RAI collection are markedly superior. His point of view differs significantly from that of other respected conductors, yet it seems well within the range allowed by Wagner and is in no way a distortion of the score.

Wagner's first three operas are of value for their foretoking of what was to come and for selected moments of beauty. They are seldom performed and few choices were available for this volume of the Audio Encyclopedia. With the other works, the difficulty stemmed from the number of excellent alternatives crying for distribution. Each has merits in our judgement, yet most have drawbacks which would preclude their distribution for other than the purposes of the Encyclopedia. All are components of the heritage of modern Wagner performance and deserve to be known even if some would not be the first choices among versions in the catalogue.

Audio Encyclopedia

The operas of

Richard Wagner

Die Feen

BBC Northern Symphony - Edward Downes

Das Liebesverbot

BBC Northern Symphony - Edward Downes

Rienzi

BBC Northern Symphony - Edward Downes

Der fliegende Holländer (in English)

English National Opera - David Lloyd-Jones (1975)

Tannhäuser

RAI Rome - Artur Rodzinski

Lohengrin

Teatro Colon - Lovro von Matacic (6 October 1964)

Der Ring des Nibelungen

RAI - Wolfgang Sawallisch (1970's)

Tristan und Isolde

Bayreuther Festspielen - Horst Stein (1977)

Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg (in English)

Sadler's Wells - Reginald Goodall (10 February 1968)

Parsifal

Muziektheater Amsterdam - Sir Simon Rattle (9 February 1997)

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