Friedrich Schnapp
in conversation with Gert Fischer

Gert Fischer: You were hired as a recording engineer by Hans Rosbaud in Frankfurt.

Friedrich Schnapp: Yes, but it was a little bit later. About 1934.

GF: But it was Rosbaud who hired you?

FS: Yes, Rosbaud was then the conductor in Frankfurt, and was looking for a recording supervisor. In Frankfurt they decided that in the future they wanted a musician to work alongside the sound engineer. Up till then it had been one and the same person, a musical engineer in charge. They thought: *«This won't work. The engineer needs a really good musician to work alongside him because while technical skills can be learned, musicality can not.»* So they wanted to hire a musician and give him some basic engineering training or at least the minimum so he could supervise recordings. And I was that man. I arrived in Frankfurt and for the next few months took courses in electronics and acoustics, in short everything related to broadcasting techniques. Then the world opened up for me and I could choose any radio station I wanted. But I decided to remain in Frankfurt because Rosbaud was a wonderful conductor and an exceptional musician. So I started work in the radio as a sound engineer and remained there until 1938, when Rosbaud left to become general musical director in Munster because he didn't wish to stay any longer at the radio orchestra. (he felt very uncomfortable working under the Nazis). I then moved to Berlin in 1938, and I remained there as sound supervisor until shortly before the end of the war. From there I managed to go to Hamburg which only had a radio station with its own orchestra and needed someone to be in charge of the engineers. I had been invited by Hamburg in March 1945 otherwise I would never have left Berlin. I stayed there and the British Occupation Forces took me on all the more willingly since I was never a member of the Nazi party. I became head of the department several times but I wanted some variety because being an administrator wasn't really *my thing* and I wanted to keep in touch with actual music making.

But it was probably Furtwängler who saved me. I told you I came to Berlin in 1938, and from 1939 on I was his recording supervisor for all the Philharmonic concerts which were all broadcast *Live.* When the war took a bad turn there was a real possibility I would be called up and sent to the front. I told Furtwängler and he asked me what he could do to help. I asked him to write a letter to Himmler's brother who was head of the administration at the Reich Radio Station in Berlin. Furtwängler's letter was very flattering and he forwarded it to the Ministry of Propaganda. And I never got called up! Furtwängler wrote that without me he couldn't work.

GF: When did you meet Furtwängler for the first time?

FS: September 1939. I remember the date because it was the start of the war. Until then I didn't know Furtwängler personally, although I had attended quite a number of his concerts in Berlin. I wasn't one of his unconditional admirers. There were quite a few things I didn't like about his way of making music, especially his interpretations

of Mozart and Bach. Thus I didn't feel at all inhibited when I met him. I had been appointed first sound engineer both at the *Reichsender* Berlin and at the *Deutschlandsender.* As such, I was in charge of the Furtwängler concerts. But Furtwängler was an extremely difficult person. The first concert he gave took place at the Radio Station and included, amongst others, Beethoven's *Eroica* (1). During rehearsals Furtwängler was informed there was a new sound engineer named Schnapp. This exasperated Furtwängler immediately because he didn't like to work with people whom he didn't know.

Which is understandable. He asked for the previous sound engineer. The man couldn't be found and the situation became rather ugly. Everyone was worked up and the Philharmoniker were already in the broadcasting hall only Furtwängler wasn't yet there, hanging around in the staircase talking with the Radio top brass. I heard my name mentioned several times. I was pacing up and down in my office. I really couldn't care less if it was me or someone else who supervised the broadcast. Then I was summoned to go up and see Furtwängler and have a brief chat. I'm not sure who asked me to come: it may have been von Westermann. I replied: *«You know, the only thing I want to know is if I have to work today or whether I can go home. I don't care about anything else».* So I went up to see Furtwängler and he came up to me and said: *«I've never met you before. I don't know who you are but now you are here to supervise this recording. I should warn you that I've never yet heard a radio broadcast that captures faithfully the way I conduct».* I answered quite coldly: *«That's too bad!»* Furtwängler looked at me in astonishment and then burst into laughter. Later, his secretary, Mrs von Rechenberg said to me: *«You managed him wonderfully»*. I said: *«Why? I only told the truth. A Live performance isn't the same at all as a broadcast»*. Especially in those days, when there was no broadcasts in stereo. But one day Furtwängler said he wanted to try. We began and I worked as the sound engineer at the control desk. We made the recording. Furtwängler asked me over the microphone a few questions and finally the recording could start. The gentlemen of the radio were happy that the ice had been broken and said: «*Naturally you will be broadcasting also the next concert from the Philharmonic Hall*». Two rehearsals followed at the Philharmonic Hall in which workmen were still building. The playback room had no window onto the orchestra and the conductor and we could talk only via loudspeakers and microphones. During the rehearsal, Furtwängler suddenly exclaimed: *«Can you hear the clarinet?»* I went out of the control room onto the balcony and said: *«Excuse me, Mr. Furtwängler, do you mean the oboe?».* Everyone smiled and laughed. I added: *«Yes, it sounded all right».* Some time later, during the same session Furtwängler asked: *«Can you hear the harp?»* I replied: *«No, I cannot hear anything»*. *«And in any case there is no harp here»* exclaimed some musicians. Furtwängler wanted to catch me out. Had I given the wrong answer or said that everything was all right, I would have been in big trouble. That was one thing I couldn't afford.

That was the sum of our conversation. He didn't talk to me again until the first broadcast of the concert. Then, some three weeks later (2), before the second Philharmonic concert, I was asked to go and see Furtwängler. It was always like a state visit! I went into his dressing room. Furtwängler was quite friendly. *«Mr Schnapp, I want to thank you. I have to admit that for the first concert I asked my most critical friends to listen to the broadcast with the utmost attention. They all were unanimous in saying that they'd never heard such a good broadcast. My*

sincerest thanks». From then on Furtwängler considered me as a trusted colleague and with time I must admit our relationship became stronger and towards the end even that of friends! For the rest of the war, I broadcast all his concerts and he asked me each time to give my critical comments. He accepted critics as long as they were honest and tactful. He always smelled flattery which he hated. He once turned towards me in a crowd of sycophants and told them, pointing at me: *«Here is my only critic».* That was true flattery!

He didn't care for many of his broadcasts by other radio stations, especially Vienna. Once he said: *«How is it possible? Each time I listen to this recording on tape* (magnetic tape recording had been introduced*) I remember perfectly well how I dampened down the woodwinds in such and such a place in the score. But on the tape they sound very loud when they shouldn't be and the crescendi are so quiet you can't even hear them! What's going on in the engineer's heads?»* I explained to him what the sound engineer was probably thinking: *«To make the dynamics audible I have to record it at maximum volume».* And the sound engineer working with several «spot» microphones to highlight individual instruments probably thought: *«The woodwinds sound rather low, so I will raise their microphone a little».* That explains why the diminuendi are too loud and the crescendi are squashed flat. In other words: the controls were turned down and then back up again. The whole thing is false. I told him then: *«You can only correct this by moving the microphones away from the orchestra and having a single microphone placed at a good distance away in the concert hall. Then the mistakes they're making in trying to achieve a correct balance within the various sections of the orchestra will be eliminated.».*

He seemed to understand this. Thereafter he asked me to accompany him to Vienna to broadcast his concerts there. Even later, after the war, he asked me to supervise the broadcasts from Salzburg. But these tasks were a burden on me because obviously I was not accepted with joy by the local sound engineers since my presence there was also a sign Furtwängler didn't trust them. But Furtwängler was so powerful that what he wanted he got. I had no choice in the matter and went with him. Furtwängler always asked me if I had any comments to make. I remember once, when we recorded Beethoven's Ninth in Salzburg (3), he made the timpani play so loud I feared we wouldn't be able to record them faithfully. To the astonishment of my Austrian colleagues I went out onto the orchestra balcony to tell Furtwängler it just wasn't possible. They all trembled because they knew what Furtwängler was like. But they didn't know the extent to which he listened to my advice. He saw me standing up there and said: *«I imagine that the timpani are much too loud again?» «Yes»* I said and he: *«but it is so beautiful».* So I said: *«All right, then».* However, things were not easy with microphones in those days. One had to be very careful about dynamics. In fact, even the slightest overloading could cause not only distortion but even ruin the broadcast signal itself. So I had to be careful. Only by following the score very closely and reducing the longer diminuendi and crescendi could I achieve this. He then said to me one day: *«What I like about you and your recordings is that you don't do anything at all».* This remark was paradoxical but it showed that I was on the right path and could reproduce his intentions even if on a smaller scale.

I have always been convinced that a concert or an operatic performance can never be replaced by radio broadcasting. The radio cannot broadcast the moment when the audience holds its breath, and then releases it with a sigh of relief. All this cannot be

broadcast and I always remember that during his broadcast of Strauss' *Don Juan*, where there's a pause just before the final bars, the audience caught its breath. Nothing could be heard, no sound, the Philharmonic Hall was filled with a unique, almost electrical tension that eased off only towards the end. My good friend Philip Jarnach who attended the concert, was very happy when I told him the concert would be broadcast eight days later. He listened to the broadcast and said: *«The pause that caused such a shock at the performance became a large empty hole on the radio. No other way to say it!»* In my opinion that's one more proof that the magic momentum in a concert or in the opera cannot be recreated in the broadcasting studio with all its qualities, and this is only valid for the better recordings!

GF: And yet, despite what you are saying, I believe that when one compares Furtwängler's studio recordings with his radio broadcasts, (compared to other conductors) there's a tremendous feeling of spontaneity, atmosphere and tension. And all three are captured on tape and I think that this also explains why the sterile atmosphere of the recording studio was foreign to Furtwängler's nature. How do you account for this?

FS: During the rehearsals, until the final dress rehearsal without the audience, he worked individually with musicians, studied the work itself and tried out his various ideas about how it could sound. An audience would have been a distraction. Therefore, the recordings of these rehearsals are extremely instructive. But concerning the performance itself, the work had been prepared so well that he would say to himself: *«It is ready to be listened to.»* Then he was ready to present it to the audience. He needed that audience!

GF: Not forgetting that with him the term «ready» never implied that this was the final version of the work.

FS: No, he studied compositions each time afresh. In fact, I would say that each of his concerts was a premiere. I remember clearly Beethoven's Fifth. Once in his dressing room I asked how many times had he already conducted it? He answered: *«Earlier I conducted it in a completely different manner than today».* He studied it constantly and was nervous (I would compare this with stage fright). And even though he knew the work inside out, he would never have said *«it will just flow on its own. I really need to conduct it.»* But he did and he always went right to the heart of the music.

GF: What were his strengths and weaknesses? Brahms and Beethoven were surely his major strengths. But you were talking about Bach, Haendel, Mozart and Wagner. What didn't you like in his performances of Bach and, in a lesser degree Haendel?

FS: He interpreted them very subjectively. In his view, the small orchestras for whom Bach wrote were all he had available at the time. He thought that Bach would have been more than happy to have an orchestra of sixty musicians rather than fifteen or sixteen for the *Brandenburg Concertos*. And for the *SaintMatthew Passion*, he was sure that Bach would have loved to have some five hundred musicians. But this is a huge mistake because, as we now know, such large orchestras simply cannot perform these works. Funny things would happen. For example, during the *SaintMatthew Passion*, where the solo flute was drowned out by a chorus of two hundred and an orchestra of the same size again!

Furtwängler wanted ten flutes! In fact, he thought that ten flutes sounded ten times louder than one. This is a total illusion and of course the result was not what he expected. The layout of the orchestra and instrumentation force us to use a small choir and orchestra. Otherwise, everything would have to be re-scored all over again. This has an effect on tempi. With such a large orchestra and chorus, the tempi drag and the *SaintMatthew Passion* loses its bounce because there are simply too many musicians. Bach wanted short, rapid, almost dry continuity. You cannot get that with huge choirs.

GF: Furtwängler wrote in the Thirties that to convey Bach's massiveness you had to employ huge orchestral and choral forces, completely ignoring modern musicological research.

FS: I never liked his ideas about dynamics in Bach. He conceived Bach's music in a very romantic way. He used to say: *«If there are no indications of pianissimo and crescendo, that's because Bach couldn't get his works printed. In his mind he knew what he wanted. So let's add these dynamics for him.»* Today we know that it was quite the opposite. When Bach wrote a forte, this forte lasted until it was replaced by a piano. That's the socalled terraced dynamics of the organ loft. The term is selfevident. Clearly, if there is a melodic line inside a forte or a piano, this causes natural modulations in the singing voice but also in the individual instruments. These are things that come naturally and the whole expression in Bach emerges by itself. Therefore one can't load it down like that. Thirdly, Furtwängler rejected the harpsichord. He thought it had been made obsolete by the modern piano. In his late romantic view he thought: If Bach had our new modern pianos available, he would no longer use the harpsichord. So, he performed the works for two harpsichords and orchestra with two pianos, or the concertos for three harpsichords with three pianos. And then, naturally, the orchestra had to be increased with all that implies for crescendi and so forth. In my opinion, this was a total caricature of Bach's intentions. Yet, Furtwängler had a very strong personality and one soon stopped trying to fight him. If you attended one of his concerts, you'd better give up your doubts or stay at home. You cannot listen to a big work by Bach from the beginning to the end if you disagree with the philosophy behind the performance. In that case I said to myself: *«Fine, I will listen to this and to how Furtwängler conveys his musical vision of Bach».* In the end Furtwängler was so convinced of his own concept you had to give in. It was all wrong and not at all to my taste. And yet, it was a grandiose performance with a grandiose impact because he «heard» it like that and he performed it from the bottom of his musical heart.

That's why he would study Beethoven's Fifth anew even though he had performed it several hundred times. And each time it would be as if he'd re-invented it. No one could talk to him before he went on stage. He would walk up and down in his room singing and conducting with his hands. He was pure tension and he told me once: *«Today I am going to conduct the Fifth quite differently»*, and indeed, every time he discovered a new aspect. He found for example that he hadn't handled the transitions between movements very well. He grappled incessantly with music and reshaped it every time. And even the works he had conducted the most he would perform as if it was the premiere. And this unbelievable tension that emanated from him conveyed itself to the audience.

GF: But what about Mozart?

FS: Mozart was a different case. Undoubtedly, he thought of Mozart as an opera composer. As a symphonic composer he thought he was simply the forerunner of Beethoven. So for him only the last three symphonies counted. Nothing else. And even those, he performed them relatively rarely and as if they were composed by Beethoven. One might say that he padded them. One had the feeling with the symphony in G flat, that it was an early Beethoven work and no one would think that it was a work by the mature Mozart. With Brahms it was quite different. I found his Brahms performances most convincing ones maybe because Brahms was closest to his generation. I can imagine that Brahms would have been very satisfied with Furtwängler's interpretations of his music. After all, Furtwängler was a youngster when Brahms was still alive. This Brahms tradition portrayed by Steinbach and his generation nourished Furtwängler from the very cradle. The other composers belonged already to history. Who really knows about this Beethoven tradition today? Whatever the tradition was it's now gone through so many hands that one cannot help wondering if we'll ever really know how musicians performed Beethoven in the early nineteenth century? Furtwängler was a remarkable synthesis of his era. He came from a highly cultured background. His father was a world famous archaeologist and therefore highly cultured. He was widely read but he'd also absorbed it. I believe I told you once we were talking about Celibidache's *Pastorale* that I wasn't very keen on and Furtwängler said: *«I believe that one has to have read Adalbert Stifter in order to conduct the Pastorale».* This was very revealing.

To put it bluntly, he lacked all the skills and technique that make a great conductor. His down beat was snakelike. His whole body shook and swayed. When was the music actually begun? But the Philharmonic were very well trained and they had the saying: *«Goedecke will make the first move».* Goedecke was the leader of the double basses and he used to give the rest of the orchestra their cue. When Furtwängler conducted in Vienna with a new concertmaster, the latter broke up the rehearsal and asked: *«Which of your zigzags is number one?»* In Berlin they knew that when it said, *«Goedecke starts»*, they all followed him. Once Furtwängler said: *«I don't understand, they always come in late, I have only given one downbeat».* These were his famous zigzags. It went so far that when I listened to a broadcast for example of the *Magic Flute*, I already knew in advance that the first three chords were not together. His critics would say that with him these chords had never been together. In Salzburg I remember, they were not together. But all that had no importance for him. But how he made that opera come alive! I dare say that there was no other great conductor who had such a poor stick technique. But even this wasn't disturbing... he was after all a great conductor. He conducted with his eyes and he had a very fine sense for dynamics within the orchestra. *«No, no, no, no, no»* again *«No».* He was rather inarticulate. He could never say: *«Second clarinet a bit lower, and first oboe a little bit louder».* This never happened. All he could do is make a pained face and say: *«No, no, no»* until he got what he wanted and was happy. He had a precise inner vision of how it should sound. And he was very generous. He performed a Brahms symphony. I spoke with him afterwards and said: *«Unfortunately, there were some wrong notes from the horns. We could do a retake.» «No, it isn't important, we'll leave it. Musically it was so beautifully played».* So we are quite far from today's perfectionists. The impression he left was so great that in the end it proves that finally it is not technical skill that makes a great conductor.

GF: You said that Furtwängler did not have absolute pitch, so one day the Berlin Philharmonic played a joke on him on his birthday (4).

FS: It happened in New York, when he conducted there for the first time. He told me this story himself. We were speaking about absolute pitch and he admitted that he didn't have it (I think even Wagner didn't have it and that has very little to do with the quality of an artist). The orchestra in New York knew this and on the occasion of a rehearsal of the Eroica on his birthday, they decided to play it in E major. And Furtwängler told me that after some twelve bars he beat on his pulpit saying: *«What's up today? It sounds so strange?»* General laughter followed. During the war, he told me about when he auditioned in Mannheim for the post of conductor at the opera house. The post of conductor was vacant. Bodanzky was leaving. There was an audition. Bodanzky was an important conductor and, as he told me, the choice was finally down to three conductors and Furtwängler. He had to conduct *Fidelio* (5).

He told me he made some bad howlers. So he thought: *«I'd better pack my things and leave.»* All the other conductors were flawless. Furtwängler heard about this and he was desperate. He wanted go home secretly without saying goodbye to Bodanzky and the other bigwigs and was rather dejected. Then suddenly Bodanzky came and said: *«Mr. Furtwängler, let's dine together tonight, or are you already invited elsewhere?» «No»*, Furtwängler answered. *«Why should I dine with you?».* Bodanzky said: *«I want to dine with you»* Furtwängler accepted. They went to a restaurant and after some polite small talk, Bodanzky said: *«Well, when can you come?»* Furtwängler answered. *«What do you mean? Are you serious? You want me to come to Mannheim?»* Bodanzky: *«Yes, of course.» «But tell me, all these foul-ups. That other conductor was so much better.» «I'm not interested»*, Bodanzky replied. *«You were by far the best! I didn't even consider any of them serious candidates!»* There Furtwängler replied: *«You see, and he was a Jew! One day I would like to write about what I owe Jews.»* They had in fact a fabulous flair for quality. And Bodanzky, who himself was a very good technician in the art of conducting and who never made mistakes during his performances, said: *«I don't care if you make mistakes but your performance was incomparable and by far the best»*. And that was the beginning of Furtwängler's real career.

GF: Today, we often say Furtwängler was the ideal interpreter of Beethoven's *Fifth* of our century. Anyone who dares conduct it differently has to be wrong. Do you agree with that?

FS: Well, I think that's quite wrong. Every conductor interprets it differently and no one conductor can be the ideal interpreter. Furtwängler was totally convincing but sometimes I said to myself *«Nobody can tell if Beethoven would have liked it that way. Yet, how he does it is wonderful!. That's all one can really say.»*

GF: Recently, people have been saying that Karajan was the true heir of Furtwängler. A Berlin critic said for instance that he was greater than Furtwängler in Schubert's *Ninth*. Do you think in relation to Karajan's style that Karajan really was his heir?

FS: I cannot really answer. I haven't heard Karajan for many years now, not even on the radio. I can only say that the word «heir» is dangerous because every important musician has his or her own individuality. Would you say that Nikisch was the heir to

Hans von Bulow or that Furtwängler was the musical heir of Nikisch? These are all totally different musicians, with their musical visions and talents. So saying something like this makes no sense. It is quite natural that after his death, Furtwängler seemed for a long time irreplaceable. And slowly, one picture fades and a successor comes along and then dominates to the exclusion of everything that went before. I think these words are very true.

GF: What about their style of interpretation and musical philosophy?

FS: Too different.

GF: They have nothing in common?

FS: Absolutely right.

GF: Did you meet Furtwängler again in Berlin, after the war?

FS: Yes, I had become a real Berliner. I wanted to go back to Berlin after the war and I managed to do it: I worked for one year and a half in the Berlin Studio of Norddeutsches Rundfunk. That was at the time when Furtwängler made his return to Berlin. But, had I stayed in Hamburg, he undoubtedly would have called me for his concerts.

GF: Did you attend his socalled rehabilitation in Berlin?

FS: Yes, of course. He was very upset and shouted at the judges *«Do not judge others if you don't want to be judged yourselves»* when they attacked him. For him this was a black comedy. That's why he waited until 1947 in Switzerland before coming back, even though the Berlin Philharmonic had been waiting for him since 1945. But when they were reunited there was a rather touching moment. After the rehearsal, when the players were trying to get near him, he turned to me and whispered: *«Do you want to have lunch with me?»* I felt very flattered! We went to eat in Dahlem, with friends (the rehearsals took place in Dahlem, in the Gemeindehaus because the Philharmonic Hall had been destroyed [6]) and I have several pictures of this reunion.

GF: In his letters he often complained of this trial as an injustice and said so many stories about him were untrue.

FS: Of course, he had been appointed *Staatsrat* without being asked and now the Allies said he's sought the job! I can only say that high party officials in golden uniforms used to come into his dressing room and salute him with a *«Heil Hitler!».* But Furtwängler never answered back *«Heil Hitler!»*. This I do know. And his defence of Hindemith was quite famous in Germany. He wrote an article stating that the ban on Hindemith was unjust. Goebbel hated him for that. They accused him of staying in Germany without thinking of the consequences. True he had stopped conducting Mendelssohn, Hindemith and Mahler and they held that against him. So his critics said that *«In those circumstances he should have left and left the Nazis to stew in their own juice.»* I am convinced that Furtwängler was one of those who was convinced the Nazis wouldn't last long. So many new governments had simply

disappeared after six to eight weeks that there were reasons to assume this Hitler would go the same way, especially at the beginning when so many of his government belonged to other parties. In 1932 it was not yet a singleparty system and dictatorship. Furtwängler must have thought: *«This cannot last very long and their plans will not come true».* Others were more intelligent or were hated by the Nazis. They got out but they expected to soon return once it was over. Well, Furtwängler stuck it out and thought (when the Nazi regime got established) he could prevent some things from happening. For example, he thought he could protect the Jewish members of his orchestra (in fact, at the beginning he managed) and in any case he never wanted people to interfere with his programs. But everything happened so fast, particularly the Hindemith affair. He suffered brutal attacks for playing such «degenerate music» and he protested against this in an open letter to Goebbels (7). Yet, he was cornered and given little choice: resign from his post and leave the country or fall in line with Goebbels. That's what he did and many people blamed him for that. Furtwängler claimed he stayed so he wouldn't let down his public. And in fact, he was able to help many halfAryans to stay on, and nonAryans to escape so they wouldn't be sent to concentration camps. All that is true.

After the fire of the Philharmonic Hall the first rehearsal was held at the *Staatsoper unter den Linden* (8) and he asked me to come down and meet him. During the interval we were alone. I stood near the footlights and he on the podium. The orchestra had left and he said: *«What do you think?»* I thought he meant the fire in the old Philharmonic and the destruction of Berlin and so I said: *«You know, this is the beginning of the end.»* He went very pale and replied *«No, I mean, here, the acoustics of the opera house.»* I realised my mistake and he smiled: *«Be careful, for God's sake. One of my closest friends said that Hitler was to blame for the catastrophe of Stalingrad. She was arrested and executed. Be very careful.»* I knew now where I stood with him and this reinforced our friendship even more. It became evident that he never agreed with the Nazi cultural policy and I know from personal discussions with him that this was genuine. He never gave the Nazi salute and this required a lot of courage. He could not avoid being appointed *Staatsrat*. Of course, the high party officials came to greet him with the Nazi salute but he answered something that sounded like *«Guten Tag». «Heil Hitler!»* never crossed his lips. Humanly he cannot be blamed but politically he was not very farsighted. For this you cannot always blame an artist. Well, he stayed on until it was hopeless, onto the bitter end you might say. But in the end even he came under suspicion. The Nazis did use him as a trump card and during the war the broadcasting of his concerts was publicity for German culture. In fact all Furtwängler concerts were broadcast by all German radio Stations not only in Germany but also in occupied countries. And that's what saved me during the war, when Furtwängler wrote to Himmler saying that I was indispensable. In fact, for the Nazis Furtwängler's concerts were great publicity.

GF: And the planned dissolution of the Berlin Philharmonic only happened after the war?

FS: The Berlin Philharmonic was in fact never dissolved. I was with the Berlin Philharmonic in Baden-Baden (9), I think in 1944, where we made recordings with the orchestra. But Furtwängler was not there. I remember the last concert of the Berlin Philharmonic that took place in the *Admiralspalast* (10) the lights went out. They were playing Mozart's symphony in G minor and nobody ever knew if the lights

would go on again. They kept on playing some twenty bars by heart, but then the music stopped. Finally the security lights went on and everybody was free to leave. Half an hour later the concert could resume. The situation was rather tense. In Vienna, we said Goodbye and he made me promise to tell them in Berlin that he would be there for the following concert (11). But he had decided not to return.

GF: It has been said that before his concerts he conducted the *HorstWessellied.*

FS: I never heard this. He might have done it once when he conducted in Nuremberg, on the occasion of the party day. But it is hard to imagine. I personally never heard him do it. He? No, never! I would remember that quite clearly.

GF: And I believe that he participated once at a Nazi party function conducting something like the *Emperor Waltz.*

FS: That's possible, although he was a very private person. He didn't care at all for social events. As I already said, as a human he was irreproachable but in political matters rather shortsighted.

GF: And how often did he work here, with the Hamburg orchestras?

FS: Relatively rarely. I believe he conducted our orchestra only twice (12). I was quite shocked when his secretary told me (I remember quite clearly): *«You know, who knows how long Furtwängler will stay? In fact the Radio found him too expensive»*. That was the situation at the time. I should add something about his compositions. It was the last time that he conducted a symphony in Hamburg. And once again I was acting as sound engineer. In any case, I remember that Furtwängler was very generous. He always was quite generous during broadcasts. He was not a fanatical perfectionist like almost all today's conductors. And on this occasion, (or later maybe, when we were alone together) he asked me something that perturbed me: *«Tell me, what would you advise me to do? Should I stop conducting and devote myself only to composition?»* His asking my advice in such a personal matter was very touching. I answered after a moment: *«Doctor Furtwängler, I think that you need conducting. I know that you would prefer to devote yourself entirely to composing and that it is your very aim and your true mission in life. Could you not find a compromise? The public needs you as well. You see, I would propose that each season you give a concert in Berlin, one in London and one in Paris, not more in the major cities. This would then automatically become the highlight of the local concert season and the rest of the time you could devote to composing.»* He thanked me quite thoughtfully but he never did it. I believe I know why: He could not turn his back on the needs and enthusiasm of his audience. He was not the man who would find happiness quietly at his desk. He needed the sight of a full audience and he needed ten curtain calls at the end of the concert.

That reminds me of an incident which happened, in Berlin, at the *Titania Palast*, the impresario was late in announcing the concert so the hall was still not fully sold out. Furtwängler got really mad. He was exasperated. This had never happened to him and he addressed the agent very rudely. He thrived on a sold-out hall and no less than ten curtain calls. It was his daily fix. So he never was able to devote himself only to composing, because he needed concerts. And that's why he died still conducting. I

also believe that he died because of too much penicillin and other medication. In fact, he could not easily afford to cancel a concert. Thus, he would immediately start taking penicillin to cure the slightest cold or so and conduct all the same. Therefore, in the end, penicillin had no more effect on his pneumonia.

You wanted me to say something about his compositions. It's not easy. I want to be positive. His second symphony for instance, is grandiose. It is written in the style of Bruckner in its dimensions and he was very doubtful if he should make a cut or not. I didn't agree with the need for any cuts. It would have destroyed the form. But it was so huge. I personally prefer something much more concise and transparent. His instrumentation is too heavy. But the willpower and the content in this work are impressive. Nowadays we seem to hold originality as the supreme form of art. So his symphonies were immediately called *«Kapellmeistermusik»*: Well, it is *Kapellmeistermusik* and one can hear echoes of Tchaikovsky, Bruckner, Brahms and others in his music. I can only say that this music has predecessors but it also has a style and character all its own. And it is pure Furtwängler. One can see his heart beating. It is full of noble inspiration, and it is tragic that he was such a great conductor, because this barred the way for his own compositions to enter today's concert repertoire. Time just passed him by.

I never heard his chamber works. I only heard people talk about them. He was very demanding. Not just anyone was allowed to play his sonata for violin and piano. They had to get his permission first. That's wrong. If someone composes a work, then everybody must have the right to play it. One plays it better, the other less well, but it's wrong to say *«I will only have him or her play it».* Half of the performers would react by saying: *«Well, then I will never play it, there is enough other music».* Furtwängler should have said: «*Nobody played it as well as he did*». It would have been a healthier attitude than endlessly coming up with all these reasons why not!

GF: Would you justify a renewed interest in his works?

FS: Yes, all the more since he is a genuine modern composer with true feelings and who shows us with practical examples that it is still possible to write good tonal music even today.

GF: He often conducted his symphony during his tours in Germany (13).

FS: Yes, and he performed it also here (14). He was of course very happy to conduct this symphony in concert.

GF: ...it is quite different when the composer conducts his own works...

FS: Of course. But he forgot that it was an additional attraction and that it would have been difficult for other conductors to include such a work in their programmes.

GF: And yet it would have been natural if Furtwängler had conducted less and less as you proposed, and devoted himself more and more to composing. And the wartime would have been the right time.

FS: Yes, that's right. Like with Goethe in his old age, I must always think of his phrase in the *Divan*: *«Flüchte du, im reinen Osten Patriarchenluft zu kosten*!» (go and save yourself in the pure eastern air of the Patriarchs). He wanted to escape all the noise and limelight of the time.

GF: A final question. You've told me some colourful stories about your work together and your memories of Furtwängler. What about his death in 1954? He died quite suddenly. What did you feel?

FS: I really don't want to talk about it. In fact, already some time before his death, his hearing had seriously deteriorated. And of course since he was aware of it this had an impact on his performances. Added to that, there was now a sort of uncertainty and I would simply say: in the case of Furtwängler the conductor, and not Furtwängler the composer, (I'm speaking of the former) his death came maybe at the right time. In fact, he died before the audience could realise that things were no longer what they had once been. But as a composer and as a human being, his loss was irreplaceable. Of course the news of his death shocked me deeply because everything then became just memories.

GF: Do you have the feeling that when Furtwängler died in 1954, the public was aware what had also died with him? I don't mean it in terms of music or of the importance of the name Furtwängler. But did the public realise that his death was also the end of an era and the bridge to something new? Were you aware of this?

FS: Well, I never cared much for public opinion, so I cannot tell. Like so many other close friends, his death hit me deeply. What public opinion thought did not interest me at the time.

GF: But it's surely significant that when he died it was the new order - von Karajan - who took over. And that meant a totally different approach to music-making. A new era at the Berlin Philharmonic.

FS: I dare say the image of «Karajan at the doorstep» was quite common while Furtwängler was still alive.

GF: And to my knowledge that had an effect on Furtwängler, in fact it was Karajan who recorded the Magic Flute instead of Furtwängler who should have done it.

FS: I don't really know but there was an old joke that went the rounds of the orchestra at the time: *«If Furtwängler had known Karajan would be his successor, then he would have done everything to stay alive».*

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notes

[1] The *Eroica* was recorded on October 1, but the tapes seem to have disappeared.

[2] The Season's first Philharmonic concert took place in Berlin on October 22.

[3] 31.8.1951

[4] This seems wrong, since Furtwängler conducted the *Eroica* in New York but on April 1, 1926, during his second tour, whilst the programme of the concert on his birthday (January 25, 1925) included *Hebrides*, *Don Juan* and Tchaikowsky's *Fifth*.

[5] Bodanzky went to Lübeck to attend Furtwängler's *Fidelio* on March 23, 1915.

[6] On January 30, 1944.

[7] On September 25, 1934, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* published on its frontpage Furtwängler's article *«Der Fall Hindemith»*. Thereafter he resigned from all his functions on December 4.

[8] The first concert at the Staatsoper was held on February 7, 1944.

[9] The Berlin Philharmonic was stationed in Baden-Baden from July 31 to September 15, 1944. Apart from concerts in the nearby towns, Schnapp made several recordings, for example the Grieg and Schumann concertos with Gieseking (released by Tahra, ref. TAH 195), Bruckner's Fourth and Brahms' Third under Knappertsbusch (released by Tahra, ref. TAH 320/22), and so on.

[10] On January 23, 1945.

[11] Furtwängler celebrated his birthday with Schnapp at the Vienna Hotel Imperial on January 25, 1945. On January 30 he cabled to the Berlin Philharmonic saying that he woumdn't conduct the concerts of February 4 and 5 because of a fall on ice.

[12] He conducted the NDWR orchestra on September 22, 1947 and on October 27, 1951 (this concert was recorded and released by Tahra, ref. Furt 1001).

[13] He conducted his second symphony during a small tour with the BPO from January 15 to 20, 1953 (six concerts). All concerts ended with Beethoven's First symphony, just to shoiw who was the most important composer!

[14] On October 17 and 18, 1948, with the Hamburg Philharmonic. This recording was released by the French Furtwängler Society (ref. SWF 921/2) (the second part of the concert was taken over by his friend Eugen Jochum).

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