

EIR Interview

Let us celebrate the great Wilhelm Furtwängler!

As Wilhelm Furtwängler's 100th birthday on Jan. 25 approaches, a number of new biographies and books have appeared on this man, most certainly the greatest conductor of our century. Precisely because Furtwängler was such a great conductor, who understood like no other how to revitalize the best that civilization has produced in music, and thus, in the sense of the German poet Friedrich Schiller, to morally improve and ennoble his listeners, he was much slandered by the envious and by his enemies. Furtwängler offended many, primarily in foreign countries, because he defended the values of the German classics during the Nazi dictatorship, the darkest period of German history, and because he tenaciously persevered in giving support to the German population with his interpretations of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven.

Today, 40 years after the end of the Nazi terror, at a point in time when suddenly many are self-interestedly rehashing the absurd reproaches of "collective guilt" and "German revanchism," it is especially important to give a historically accurate presentation of both Furtwängler's artistic achievements and his moral stand.

For that reason, the German magazine Ibykus, which describes itself as a journal "for poetry, science, and statecraft," held a long conversation with Mrs. Elisabeth Furtwängler in April 1985, in Clarens on Lake Geneva, in which she, with refreshing openness, described some of the decisive moments in Furtwängler's life. Character traits emerged which have previously not been acknowledged or appreciated—or, if at all, only slightly. That Wilhelm Furtwängler was in constant conflict with the Nazis to preserve "German music" from abuse is generally known. That he protected many, many Jewish colleagues from the Nazis and made possible their emigration is likewise known, as is the fact that he was forced to flee to Switzerland at the beginning of 1945.

But the real motivation for his actions has been passed

over in silence or mentioned only superficially: his unshakable faith in Germany as a nation of culture deeply rooted in Judeo-Christian civilization. When Furtwängler learned in 1945 that writer Stefan Zweig had shot himself in Brazil, because Zweig could no longer tolerate the life of an emigré, Furtwängler told his wife, that would also have been his own fate as an emigré.

Elisabeth Furtwängler characterized her husband as humorous, serious, even deeply religious, a man who was not only "always at work" and who played Beethoven sonatas in his "free time," but who was also passionately interested in contemporary events, above all in fundamental scientific questions from such distant areas as astronomy (spiral nebulae) and agriculture.

This interview not only answers many questions of the "what" of Furtwängler's life, but also the "why"—and that renders the interview an important as well as interesting contemporary document. The interview was conducted by Ortrun and Hartmut Cramer.

Ibykus: Mrs. Furtwängler, in this, the "Year of European Music," 30 years after the anniversary of the death of your husband, and shortly before his 100th birthday, it is certainly appropriate to remember Wilhelm Furtwängler, since he understood as few others how to bring "German," or, better, "European" music to life and, in doing that, to encourage men throughout the world. Despite his incontestable musical achievements, which went along with his exceptional moral stand, many reproaches were made against your husband during the postwar period because he remained in Germany and did not, unlike many of his colleagues, emigrate. Wilhelm Furtwängler certainly knew what the Nazis were. Why did he, despite that, remain in Germany during the Nazi period?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, he knew what the Nazis were.

Of course, he didn't know about Auschwitz, since no one in Germany knew about that—only the soldiers stationed there. You must consider, that during the war there was no communication. In peace, Auschwitz would not have been possible, that is quite clear.

Why did he stay in Germany? *Because of the Germans!* Because so many people knew: He was German in the best, classical sense. He remained for the Germans who were not Nazis.

It is simply not true that all the people were Nazis. Certainly, there was a large number of fellow travelers, especially after the initial victories in the war, but we certainly must keep in mind, to be quite accurate, that Hitler's popularity had begun to wane just before the seizure of power. In the last free election, in 1932, Hitler's popularity fell off so sharply that Furtwängler was actually led to believe, as were many others, that the major danger was past.

But then, when Furtwängler realized what was happening and understood what horrible characters the Nazis actually were, he said: One must keep the flag flying here in Germany. And there are many who had the highest regard for Furtwängler, just because he took this stand. For example, Countess [Marion] Dönhoff, [the publisher of *Die Zeit*] who herself wrote in *Die Zeit*: "I shall never forget the consolation I experienced in the Furtwängler concerts in Berlin at that time. Every listener who attended these concerts knew exactly what Furtwängler thought."

Ibykus: How did you experience the effect of Furtwängler's concerts; what was the effect of classical music on the Germans, especially under the Nazis and during the war?



Elisabeth Furtwängler, before a portrait of her husband.

Elisabeth Furtwängler: I believe it was right that Furtwängler remained in Germany. Because he gave other Germans so infinitely much that was good and glorious. Because he simply believed in other Germans. He believed in the greatness that is within Germans and especially within the music. Music was the greatest thing of all for him—as for many others. And if you leave aside all German-speaking composers, there's not much left. He felt himself to be a German musician, and a German conductor, and therefore he stayed.

Ibykus: Did he have the possibility of leaving Germany?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes. Surely you know of the famous incident with the pass, when Goebbels told him: "Emigrate if you please, with everything you possess, with money and family. But you will never be able to set foot on German soil again." And that, for Wilhelm, was not possible. I still remember exactly the day on which it became known that Stefan Zweig had shot himself. We were already here in Switzerland, and my husband said to me: "You see, that's what I would have done had I emigrated. I couldn't live without the possibility of seeing Germany again." There were many Jews in Germany who fully understood that.

Ibykus: Who, for example?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Horenstein. Horenstein told me later that he understood very well that which is specifically German. Or, for example, the emigrés whom we met in London immediately following the war. Hardly had we arrived when we were surrounded by them, both Germans and Austrians. They knew very well that Furtwängler was no Nazi; we could embrace them, and we visited with them all.

Furtwängler wanted to touch everyone with the music that belongs to them all. And, naturally, Jews could understand that well, since Jews have a virtually unequalled understanding of art that is, as it were, innately within them. I have also received a number of letters from Israel. There is a music critic in Israel who has frequently visited me. He constantly writes in favor of Furtwängler in Israel. The difficulty for Furtwängler during the Nazi period was that everyone inside Germany knew that he was not in favor of Hitler and that people outside Germany believed that he was in favor of Hitler. That was essentially his problem.

Ibykus: Who was against him then?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: At that time, unfortunately I must say this, there were many Americans against him. A book is about to appear in which all this will be very exactly described, above all, the entire American situation. Naturally, we can't say America in this regard, since it was only a small group of people who opposed Furtwängler, primarily in New York.

During the Nazi period, musicians primarily in New York intrigued against him. Their principal motivation, as Yehudi Menuhin thought at that time, was their anxiety about their

own "happy hunting ground." In the postwar period, John McCloy [the postwar U.S. High Commissioner for Germany—ed.] allied with this group. He wanted to prevent Furtwängler's ever conducting again, and he never would have conducted again had it been up to McCloy. Unfortunately, many opposed Furtwängler even though they knew better. But there were many, very many, who were for him, and it was very difficult for them.

Ibykus: Who were the friends that helped him?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Over in America, there were naturally the members of the Philharmonic whom he had assisted in emigrating. Piatigorsky, Graudan, the violinist Gilbert Back and the conductor Fritz Zweig, who died a short time ago. He had a number of friends, precisely among his Jewish colleagues, who knew exactly what was going on and who also did not allow themselves to be deceived.

Ibykus: What part did Yehudi Menuhin play?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yehudi was tremendous for Furtwängler, from the very beginning. He also oriented himself musically toward Furtwängler.

Yet they didn't know one another personally. That was the great surprise in 1946, that someone suddenly stood up for him that he didn't himself know at all. Menuhin had heard about Furtwängler from many. He had spoken in Paris with many musicians who told him what Furtwängler had actually been. Menuhin's second wife and her sister knew Furtwängler. And, of course, there was also Bertel Geismar, Furtwängler's secretary for many years, who had had to emigrate in 1936 because she was a Jew. She informed Menuhin very accurately about Furtwängler. Then Yehudi visited us here in Clarens, and, in the further course of time, we got to know one another personally quite well.

It must be said that Yehudi Menuhin is certainly one of the noblest human beings on this earth. He has incredible personal courage and great independence. Many find him, however, a bit too soft, but that is not true; he also has the courage to say no. His artistry also rests in part on his great moral power.

Ibykus: Wilhelm Furtwängler was not close to the Nazis; he intervened for many of his Jewish musical colleagues, and in some cases saved their lives. For that reason, he was constantly quarrelling with Goebbels. The "Furtwängler Case" in 1934 is quite famous; there was a public fight with Goebbels over a Hindemith concert. Finally, he had to flee to Switzerland because of the Nazis. That was all known in the postwar period. Then why were there such difficulties about Furtwängler's "de-Nazification" when the facts so unambiguously spoke in his favor?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, it is very strange. On many important things in this connection, we don't have the evidence any longer. It is simply lost, especially all the things which his famous housekeeper Lenchen unfortunately de-

stroyed at the beginning of 1945 out of fear of the advancing Russians. She was so terrified that she destroyed all letters on Nazi stationery or that contained a single "Heil Hitler." That proved to be very sad, since there were mostly splendid things in those letters, how he had defended himself against Goebbels in doing this or that. That was all investigated during the "de-Nazification" of my husband, and then it turned out that a part of Furtwängler's correspondence, principally that with Goebbels, simply didn't exist any longer.

Ibykus: How did the "de-Nazification" of your husband actually go?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Really, there couldn't have been any problems. But there were. Initially, everything went wrong. But, then, when the whole procedure was redone, his friends spoke out on how things had actually been, and then everything went smoothly. And yet Furtwängler didn't receive his certification from the Americans; it came and it didn't come.

At this time, he received an invitation from Rome. He answered that he would gladly come, but unfortunately had not been yet "de-Nazified," and therefore would not be allowed to. The Italians answered: "That doesn't interest us in the least. We want to hear you." And so we traveled to Rome. And who came to three concerts? American radio. Clearly they suddenly noticed: he certainly managed that without us.

The Russians were, incidentally, really much more clever. In 1946, still before the final "de-Nazification," Furtwängler was approached one day in the Russian sector of Vienna by a Russian officer: "Don't you really want to go back to Berlin?" Of course, that was what he wanted all along, but he had received no authorization. Of course, he wanted to go back to Berlin. "We are flying out the next morning, come along with us." And so he was flown back to Berlin by the Russians—quite alone, in a gigantic troop transport. On arrival in East Berlin, [Johannes R.] Becher [the writer and president of the Union for Democratic Renewal of Germany—ed.] was at the airport to greet him, together with a large group of artists. The Russians then immediately concluded the preparations for a concert. A new piano was prepared and Furtwängler received every assistance.

Ibykus: And so the Russians would have liked for Furtwängler to stay with them?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, of course. They were ready to give him anything, to actually roll out the red carpet. But Wilhelm wanted the Berlin Philharmonic, and they were now elsewhere. For a time, we could travel from Potsdam, where we lived, across the Glienicke Bridge over to the Western sector. Then that was closed, and we had to move back to West Berlin. The Russians were, however, very accommodating. At that time, there was still no wall.

Ibykus: Who interceded for him most clearly during the "de-Nazification"?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: In Germany, really very many colleagues interceded for him. Boleslav Barlog perhaps most strongly, but also Celibidache. I would like to emphasize that very strongly, that Celibidache stuck by Furtwängler, when he could have been really quite different since, in the meantime, he had become Furtwängler's "successor" and could have indulged in some wonderful intrigues.

Ibykus: How did the *public* react when Furtwängler returned to Berlin?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Gloriously, absolutely gloriously. But Berliners are unique. I still remember how it was when Wilhelm returned to Berlin with the famous Beethoven concert of 1947—the Egmont Overture, the "Pastoral," and the Fifth. The Berliners sold their porcelain, they sold virtually everything to be able to get tickets for this concert. And Erika

Mann wrote at that time: Those were all Nazis that went to the concert. That was so despicable.

Ibykus: Erika Mann was the daughter of Thomas Mann . . .
Elisabeth Furtwängler: . . . yes, and Thomas Mann may have been a great writer, but he was also a cold man, a very cold man. It's known that he said, in reference to the destruction of the Marienkirche in his home town of Lübeck, that that didn't interest him, the main thing was that now the Germans be obliterated.

And just compare that with Oskar Kokoschka's reaction [German painter, professor at the Academy of Art, Dresden, 1918-24—ed.], who was in London, and also had to look on as an emigré, as Dresden and other German cities were bombed and completely devastated. He was deeply shocked, and almost became ill, because art works were being destroyed

Behind the slanders against Furtwängler

From Furtwängler's debut in America in 1925, until his death in 1954, the U.S. Eastern Establishment, and particularly its house organ the *New York Times*, subjected him to a campaign of villification and even death threats. As the greatest conductor of the 20th century, the representative of the highest tradition of German culture, Furtwängler was an intolerable threat to those who sought to stamp out the true classical heritage of Beethoven and replace it with "modern music"—the cult of irrationalism. Further, since the 19th century, the Anglophiles of the New York Council on Foreign Relations and other "elite" circles had determined to break the historical and cultural link between America and Germany, whipping up hysteria against "the Hun" and going so far as to ban the teaching of German during World War I.

These very "elites" who maliciously tarred Furtwängler as a Nazi, belonged to the international conspiracy of financiers and cultists that put Hitler into power, as the Schiller Institute documented in *The Hitler Book* (New York: 1984). Always in the vanguard, the *New York Times* promoted the Neville Chamberlain policy of appeasement of Hitler, until that was no longer acceptable to anyone.

Furtwängler wrote in a letter dated 1948, that the real leader of the slanders against him in the United States was Ira Hirschmann, an attaché at the State Department during World War II, who had joined forces with a clique around

the self-styled anti-fascist Arturo Toscanini. American musicologist Daniel Gillis, a friend of the Furtwängler family and author of the book *Furtwängler in America* (New York: 1970) wrote that Furtwängler believed that Howard Taubman, *New York Times* correspondent and biographer of Toscanini, was one of the key people involved.

Furtwängler had planned an American tour after the war, but this had to be canceled when he received an anonymous letter, threatening him with "fatal consequences" if he dared to conduct in Chicago: "Think about this warning carefully. It will be the only one."

Gillis establishes that the attacks against Furtwängler had already begun in 1925, when his first appearance in New York prompted a standing ovation from a wildly enthusiastic audience, which applauded for 15 minutes after the performance of Brahms' First Symphony. Members of the orchestra and other musicians proposed to have Furtwängler as a regular guest conductor in New York or even as chief conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. It was *New York Times* correspondent Olin Downes, with his slandering critiques, who played the decisive public role in sabotaging this plan.

Behind the scenes, it was the East Coast elite controllers of New York's musical institutions, who did the real job, by bringing Toscanini to the United States instead. (Toscanini was a product of the Venetian oligarchy that created Nazi "culture," and he personally ran for office in 1919 on the ticket of Mussolini's National Fascist Party.) This accomplished two things: It prevented Furtwängler from conducting in the United States, and it kept American audiences from understanding classical music in general and Beethoven in particular.

which were simply irreplaceable. Kokoschka would become terribly agitated over such things.

The German population was completely defenseless. During the day, the Allied bomber formations could be seen as they flew over; generally, there were no more anti-aircraft; the bombers could fly calmly over Germany and, then, when they reached their target, simply drop the bombs. Kokoschka never got over the destruction of Dresden.

Ibykus: One individual who helped Furtwängler during the last months of the war and advised him to escape was Albert Speer [Hitler's Minister for Armaments]?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Speer had known Furtwängler from back in the Mannheim years, 1917 or 1918. At that time, Speer had been a young student who went to Furtwängler's concerts and simply adored him. Furtwängler had later seen him again in Berlin.

As for the warning, it happened like this. In January 1945, as Furtwängler was giving his last concert, complete with air-raid sirens, Speer came back to the green-room during intermission, and said: "Herr Furtwängler, I hear that you have been invited to give some concerts in Zurich and Geneva. Well now, I think you look rather miserable. I am sure that no one could take it badly if you were to take a holiday now in Switzerland."

You can imagine, how strenuous the regular trips between Berlin and Vienna on the train are by themselves; added to that, however, were air-raid alarms, war, and the constant fear. But Furtwängler wanted to go. An incredibly positive tension dominated his concerts. The tape recordings from 1942, '43, and '44 which still exist are among the most beautiful of Furtwängler's recordings. Because everybody was under such a tremendous tension, the artists as well as he and the public. Each time it was like a—perhaps this sounds like an exaggeration—but it was like a final holy service. More or less for everybody.

I still remember exactly how my husband asked me after the last concert: "Tell me, Speer said something to me today—do I really and truly look so horribly miserable and sick?" In the meantime, Furtwängler had, however, received other warnings, very clear warnings, which at first he didn't believe. He got most of them after July 20, 1944 [the date of the aborted German army coup against Hitler—ed.], three in all. And only when he noticed that he was being followed or shadowed did he have to take that seriously, and, after the conversation with Speer, draw the conclusions. So he didn't return to Berlin, but fled here to Switzerland.

As we learned in 1948 in Argentina, Speer had tried a total of three times to warn us—through his adjutant, a flight officer—against a return to Germany. These messages, however, had obviously been intercepted by the Nazis. The first warnings we received, incidentally, were from Mrs. Himmeler's doctor, who lived near us in Potsdam. She came one day to us and said: "You are on a list. I have seen the list. It is a list of 'unreliable elements,' with whom party members

are not allowed to have social contact. Please be careful." At first, Wilhelm had only laughed. But then, after July 20, 1944, she came again and warned Wilhelm more urgently, and said, "No one must see that I come to you."

Ibykus: Did Furtwängler have friends in Switzerland?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, many. But the two great people who did the most for us at that time were Ernest Ansermet in Geneva and Werner Reinhard in Winterthur. Although we had a house in Graubünden, that canton couldn't admit us because the influence of the Nazis there for the preceding 12 years had been too great, and, also, the canton didn't or couldn't admit any more Germans. But the Vand canton did admit us, principally because Ansermet and others interceded for Furtwängler.

Ibykus: November 1984 was the 30th anniversary of the death of Wilhelm Furtwängler, and, at the beginning of 1986, he would have been 100 years old. In between, 1985 is the "European Year of Music," in which we are celebrating the birthdays of Bach, Handel, and Scarlatti. In light of these "jubilees," the question is appropriate, what is Wilhelm Furtwängler's legacy, and will it be continued?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Shortly after his death in 1954, there was, in spite of the mourning, actually a great enthusiasm for his work, and many musicians and conductors were very committed to him and came to understand him, above all Keilberth. And then everything was quiet. But now it's different. Since about 10 years ago, there has been something like a Furtwängler renaissance, especially internationally. Particularly among young artists. When recently Yo Yo Ma, the young Chinese cellist who lives in the United States, gave a wonderful Bach concert, he embraced me on leaving. That was meant for Furtwängler. When Murray Perahia was here, a young, fabulous pianist from New York whom I had not previously known, he asked especially for me, so that he could talk about Furtwängler, whom he admires so much.

And then, of course, there is Barenboim, to whom Wilhelm personally gave his blessing.

Ibykus: Did he teach Barenboim?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: No, not teach. Barenboim played for Wilhelm when Barenboim was a little fellow only 12 years old. Wilhelm was deeply impressed, and also put that in writing for him. Although Barenboim is accused of "furtwänglering" when he conducts, he is an incredibly talented conductor. Perhaps he is too talented for being so young—for the many who envy him.

Ibykus: You were recently in Japan. Is there great enthusiasm for your husband there?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, very much. What the Japanese are doing in relation to Furtwängler is on a gigantic scale, just like everything in Japan that has to do with music. Last year, two books were written about Furtwängler at the



*Wilhelm Furtwängler
rehearses in the Hamburg
Music Hall.*

same time, one by the musicologist Shidori and the other by the Germanist Ashizu. Shidori's book came out last October, just as I was there, and there are already 10 printings of it. The Germanist Ashizu released his book on Nov. 30, 1984, on the 30th anniversary of Furtwängler's death, and, by January, 42,000 copies have already been sold. Imagine, 42,000 in one month! Our publishers dream of that sort of thing.

All the lectures and essays that my husband gave or wrote are now in Japanese. Basically, there is not a word of Furtwängler that has not been translated into Japanese. That's what it's like in Japan.

Ibykus: You gave lectures in Japan?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, two. One in Tokyo, the other in Kyoto, and both were very well attended. Toshiba and one of the largest Japanese newspapers invited me and organized everything. Interest was extraordinarily great. The representative of the Goethe Institute told me that he had been asked by Toshiba to announce the lectures. "We had hardly begun to advertise when it was completely sold out. It isn't like that with the other events we give."

It was glorious, but very strenuous. Every hour was planned out, with lectures, visits, and interviews, for example, with women's magazines. Those 11 days were very interesting.

Ibykus: What is your relation to music; do you play an instrument?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: No, unfortunately not. Of course, I learned to play the piano early, but my field is the visual

arts. And Furtwängler also shared this interest. We went together to every museum, since we understood each other very well.

Of course, I was interested in music, and as a child went to all the operas. But because I concerned myself primarily with the visual arts, the enrichment of my life through music because of Furtwängler was and still is enormous. For example, Wagner was inaccessible to me, and that was changed by my husband. The entire greatness of Wagner and many, many others first became clear to me through him.

Ibykus: What was Furtwängler's relation to Wagner? Didn't he sharply reject him in his youth?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, in his youth he didn't want to have anything to do with Wagner—all that existed for him was Beethoven. And yet he is the only conductor whose picture does *not* hang in the Beethoven house in Bonn, as Furtwängler's outraged French devotees in Paris told me. But that only in passing.

Concerning Wagner, I could tell you a thousand things about how he came to know Wagner and to acknowledge Wagner's greatness. His first performance of Wagner was quite early; in Lübeck, he conducted *Die Meistersinger*. In Bayreuth, there was a row, with Toscanini, that is well known, but also with Winifred Wagner, because they claimed artistic leadership exclusively for themselves.

Ibykus: Is there a musical tradition in your family?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes. My aunt, my mother's sister, was the first "Rosenkavalier" in the Berlin National Opera,

then the Royal Opera House. And, at home, there were many evenings of lieder and music, as was then customary. My mother was a politician, a deputy in the Reichstag for the Deutsche Volkspartei, Stresemann's party.

Of course, there had to be difficulties with the Nazis for a woman involved in politics. That was also true for my mother. She had never kept her mouth shut. She was not nationalistic, and at that time that was bad, although she did adore Bismarck. She was also a modern woman, and, for example, made me keep my hair bobbed. When I was 12 or 13, I had my pigtails cut off and gave them to her for Christmas. That was, oddly, very unpleasant for me, but I stuck to it. So, she was really hypermodern. But, of course, German.

Ibykus: And what was the music like later, in the Furtwängler family?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: When I got to know the Furtwängler family, he was the dominating husband, the others worshipped him, so to speak.

Ibykus: When was that?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: I met him in 1940, and we married in 1943. He was very secluded. He had three brothers and sisters. One sister sang with the Berlin Philharmonic Choir. His father was a good, a brilliant pianist; and he was very romantic, as his son used to say with a smile.

Ibykus: What was your musical life like, after you were married, primarily as the children grew up; did you perform music together?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Naturally, Wilhelm played the piano at home and, naturally, our boy Andreas learned to play the piano. Unfortunately, when he started school, he stopped.

Furtwängler himself played a lot of Beethoven, that was so essentially his nature. Recently, someone asked me, "What did Furtwängler do when he wasn't working, how did he divert himself?" Well, about that, I can only recall that we took many trips to the mountains, and evenings, Wilhelm played Beethoven sonatas. But otherwise, he worked; he always worked.

Ibykus: Did he have anything like a favorite piece?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: No. Whatever he was playing, that was his favorite, so to speak. He had a quite particular affinity to Brahms, a great affinity even, but Beethoven was the ideal. He always said: "Good Lord, German music has such richness! I think it's terrible when someone says: 'I love only Schubert, I love only Mozart, I love only Bach.' Why? Because we can be so very happy that we have them all." I heard him say that any number of times. There are always people who say, "But this is really more beautiful." To that, he always said, "Yes, yes, when I play Bach, that is the most beautiful."

Ibykus: Has this tradition been continued by the children?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: At least in part. One of my older grandchildren is studying music here in Geneva. But I don't know if the Furtwängler legacy will be continued. Furtwängler himself used to always say that it is very difficult to be an artist. For, if someone understands much about music, but cannot produce it, as he would like, so that others can be really enriched by it, that will always cause suffering.

He often related the following example in this connection, and he stated this without the least vanity, merely basing himself on his ability: "I know that when I am not conducting the orchestra, the Berlin orchestra, then those will suffer most who know music best. For they are only happy when the most sublime interpretation is performed. With orchestras, there are always, let's say, 25% of the players who are the very best. Then there are another 25% who play very well. Then there are those who are only very musical and can do it, and then there are finally those who merely think that playing is merely their job and are really not interested, but are swept along with the others. Technically they are all perfect, relatively so, according to which orchestra one is standing in front of."

Ibykus: To return once more to your family: Was Furtwängler himself ever, like his father, interested in archeology?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: He was interested in almost all the arts, for example, in the Renaissance, in Michelangelo, and other painters. He always said how his father had been really somewhat disappointed that he had been so impressed by the Renaissance when, on the contrary, his father was naturally strictly for the Greeks.

But his father must have been a wonderful man. I asked Furtwängler once: "I hear constantly that your father's students are so fond of him and enjoy his lectures so much. Did you ever go to one of your father's lectures?" "Yes, once I went to hear Dad. But he didn't expect that of me at all."

And that's how Wilhelm was as well. He never wanted to force anything upon anyone, especially in matters of great art. And Adolf Furtwängler was himself musical enough to recognize his son's talent very early. Therefore, he excused him even from school. He was the wildest man. That really must have been the most impossible professor's home in Germany, since such homes were often rather stuffy.

Ibykus: Did your husband involve himself with other sciences?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Well, I must say, I don't know, since I was his companion only in the last 13 years of his life and he was a man who—very seriously—lived each day as it came. He neither lived in the past nor in the future. He lived today. What counted for him, was what the problems are today. How Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion* speaks to us today, that is important. Not to perform it some way or other

just because we read somewhere how Bach performed the *Passion*. Of course, it must be done the way Bach wrote it, but still not in the sense that it has nothing to say to us today.

The historical way of considering music, he said, yes, that is all very interesting—for a historian of music, but not for contemporary human beings. For them, what is interesting is what it has to say today. Goethe once said: “Most men live in the past, or in the future; it must be very difficult to live in the present.” Furtwängler lived in the present.

Ibykus: Since you just mentioned the *St. Matthew's Passion*: What philosophical views did he have, was he a religious man?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, yes. It was quite impossible that Wilhelm not be a religious man. He wasn't a churchgoer, but he was religious, even a deeply religious man.

Apropos the *St. Matthew's Passion*, there is a story. He told me this before we were married. “You know,” he said, “this Weingartner, who wrote books on Beethoven, do you know what he selected to have played at his death bed? The final scene from *Aida*.”

Since I always found this passage from the opera so wonderful, I didn't say anything at all at first since I didn't want to make a fool of myself. Then I asked him, what would he want? And I shall never forget what happened then: the sudden change in his face. The ironical outrage over his colleague who had wanted something so superficial—for him superficial—suddenly vanished. “I,” he said with a complete transformation of his face, “I would say ‘Wenn ich einmal soll scheiden,’ [‘When one day I must depart’] from the *St. Matthew's Passion*.” I shall never forget that. The vast change in his expression. That's why I say, a religious man. He was that. Otherwise, he couldn't have conducted the way he did.

At his concerts, the people were a genuine community; they were captivated by what took place. And there was a religious component to that, there truly was. We can't get away from that. It was simply there without him directly intending it.

Also, when he spoke about religion, he said, “You know, for us, for Europeans, Christianity is obligatory. That belongs to us, it fits us, we are that. European, Christian.” That was something of which he was convinced.

Ibykus: Did he take any interest in scientific problems?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, he was madly interested in all that. I can still remember that he read an article on agriculture in a geological magazine. It was about the awful exploitation of the soil in the United States. He immediately began to think about a solution to the problem. “However, that is, after all, America. The experts there have to appeal to the government, and the farmers have to be told how it can be done differently and better, so the soil will not be leached.” He was also interested in contemporary problems. As I previously said, he lived in the present.

Ibykus: Was he interested in astronomy?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: He was enormously interested in astronomy, above all in spiral nebulae. He consumed entire whole books on the subject. He always used to say: “Imagine, there are whole worlds beyond our Earth, which is only a tiny part of all that. Each of these spiral nebulae is such a new world.” Yes, he was very interested in astronomy.

Ibykus: Who did he discuss all these questions with? Probably with you . . . ?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, he told me all that. But he read and discussed them with Oscar von Panther. Von Panther was also a conductor, and Furtwängler had conversations with him on those topics, I know that. Von Panther had been a friend from his youth, and was also very talented musically. He also wrote a small book on Furtwängler and the Ninth Symphony. He was a good friend of his.

Ibykus: Another friend was Heinrich Schenker?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, he was the most important man in Furtwängler's life in those days. My husband wrote something on that, and I also wrote of it in my book.

Ibykus: Yes, but could you add some personal things to that?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Since Heinrich Schenker in Vienna had no telephone, Wilhelm always had to send him postcards when he came to Vienna and wanted to visit Schenker. Even at that time, that was very old fashioned. Usually these postcards, one of which is still in the posthumous papers, said only, “Will come at such and such a time. Don't take any trouble. Wilhelm Furtwängler.”

Ibykus: What did your husband and Schenker mostly talk about together?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Beethoven. Beethoven, principally. Furtwängler had previously read a lot of Schenker, especially what he had written on Beethoven, and then he finally met him personally, in Vienna in 1917 or '18. And Schenker, I must say, he died—thank Heavens, one can only say—before the Nazis could kill him because he was a Jew. This Schenker was such a German, you can't even imagine. If what he wrote on German music, in contrast to other music, were written today, it would cause the greatest difficulties.

And who was exactly the same? Mahler. It was just that which always upset Wilhelm to the point of distraction. “The Jews understand us. And Mendelssohn is a German composer.” How often he said that. “Exactly like Mahler,” he usually added. But with Mendelssohn, there were two pieces for him. The music to Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Violin Concerto. “That is the most sublime peak, there, where the truly great are found,” he always said. Naturally, he also conducted the symphonies of Mendelssohn, such as, for example, “The Italian.”

Ibykus: Furtwängler was a defender of the tonal, well-tempered system. Mrs. Picht-Axenfeld told us some time ago that Furtwängler intended to establish composing in the tonal system as law, so to speak.

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, and that was primarily with Ansermet. That was a great, late friendship. They always talked very intensely on that subject. There are even letters from Wilhelm to Ansermet in which they discuss that. And although Ansermet stood up for the moderns, still he emphasized along with Wilhelm that there can be no music without the tonal system. Naturally, I still have the letters from Ansermet to Wilhelm in which they discuss the questions of tonality. There was a sort of division of labor between them. Wilhelm always used to tell him: "You have to write the book and I have to compose. We will fight together, but each in his own field." Ansermet did write a large book on composition, very philosophical and also mathematical. Since it is difficult to read, he also did a small book as a summary so that it would be more comprehensible to laymen.

Ibykus: Were there others in addition to Ansermet with whom he discussed these questions?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Naturally, there were many colleagues with whom he discussed these questions. But the one who really understood that, who also enriched Furtwängler, that was only Ansermet. With Schenker, of course, the discussion would have been quite different because of the difference in generations. Often Oswald, one of Schenker's students, also came and visited us here.

Ibykus: What conception of musical education did he have for children? Did he sing with them?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Unfortunately, he had very little time for the education of his children. But my grandchildren are all very strong in singing. Not that they will become singers, but some of them do sing in a choir. I have five grandchildren who sing in a choir. They are passionate choristers. Unfortunately, Wilhelm did not live to see that.

Ibykus: Did your husband also sing?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Wilhelm could not sing, he was always out of tune when he sang. Of course, that sounds funny when I say it like that, but it's true. There is a lecture by Hans-Peter Schmitz, which he gave on Nov. 30, 1984 to the Society of Friends of the Berlin Philharmonic, which has now appeared as a book. It's a very good lecture, and he says there that Furtwängler always sang along while conducting, "in which case it wasn't always important whether he hit the right note or not"—he put it so nicely. And it's true. There are not many conductors who sing well. One could sing well, genuinely sing, and he also sang along, and that was Josef Krips. He was the only one. No, Wilhelm could not sing, but his sister was a good singer, a choir singer, a mainstay of the choir.

Ibykus: In other words: If Furtwängler had had more time, to educate his children. . . .

Elisabeth Furtwängler: . . . he would have thought singing wonderful and right. Very much so. He would have found singing important because he always envied people who could sing because, as he always said, singing contributes to the improvement of mankind.

But he was also in favor of his children being physically active. He was always very much in favor of physical activity. Going up into the mountains, playing ping-pong. He always played catch with the children, and did all sorts of tricks. Afterward, the children said, "We put up with the tricks so he would continue to play."

Ibykus: Are the literary remains of Furtwängler in Zurich?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes. No one in Germany asked me for them. Only Dr. Birkner in Zurich, who is, of course, a German. He became aware of me through a young American who was interested in Wilhelm's compositions.

The Central Library in Zurich is naturally not so large or comprehensive as the libraries in Vienna or Berlin. But the German libraries did not want the literary remains. Later, the Berliners said that they had no money. But Birkner in Zurich took it on himself, without any money, to concern himself with the complete literary remains of Furtwängler. I am very happy about that, because I know that it will be done properly, and people can go there and look at everything and study it, just like in large libraries.

Ibykus: How can the power of Furtwängler be continued?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: There is only one way. People have to listen to the things which he created. Moreover, it must come of itself. But interest is still very great—everywhere. Just think of Japan. I did nothing in this regard. And then came the invitation to give two lectures. Also, the leader of the symphony in Osaka conducted Furtwängler's Second Symphony in October 1984, and now, a few weeks ago, a Japanese musician came and brought me a record of this concert from his boss, a compact disc at that. In such a short time, all that was done. He succeeded with the First Movement wonderfully, and the orchestra is very good. And, besides, Furtwängler's pieces are very difficult.

Ibykus: Could you say anything about Furtwängler the composer?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: He oriented himself completely to the sonata form, even for the symphony, as Beethoven and Brahms had done. Exactly as he said, that tonality has not been exhausted, he also said that the sonata form is something in which something can be expressed. Even today, something can still be created.

Ibykus: What can you do, and what are you doing, to preserve the memory of your husband?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: I have perfect pitch; not musically,

but for what is said about Furtwängler. Thus, I can say: Yes, that's true. Exactly that is true. And that, no, it wasn't like that. For example, recently someone, to characterize Furtwängler's attitude toward young artists, began his presentation with the unctuous words, "My dear young friend." Quite false, Furtwängler never said such a thing. He generally had nothing of the pastor about him; he was never pompous. Very friendly and nice in contact with young people whom he helped wherever he could, but never with exaggeration. He hardly needed to emphasize his power.

And so, there is one thing I can do as long as I live. To say: That is true, that isn't true. And when I am asked, as you are doing now, then I can say: Everything, that I have said and told, is true.

One man who characterized Furtwängler brilliantly was Hans Keller, a Jew from Vienna, who lived a long time in London. Keller vividly described Furtwängler's temperament in a radio broadcast, when he strikingly imitated Wilhelm's reaction to Keller's question about Webern's and others' atonal music. "He suddenly pounded on the table, and ran around like a young man, and . . . he said everything what you expected he would say! [*sic*—quotation in English in the original—ed.]" And that was so good. And so right.

And so you ask, what do I intend to do? Well, I stand, as is so beautifully said, ever vigilant, ready to prevent anything

false being said. There will be much false that will be said in the future, and even more will be falsely understood.

It is wonderful to see how people from all social levels and political camps all become unified when it is a question of Furtwängler and his music, even if they otherwise hit each other over the head and are of quite different opinions. But in regard to Furtwängler and what he meant to them, then there is a unanimity.

Ibykus: Are preparations being made for next year, the 100th anniversary of his birth?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: Yes, in Vienna, Paul Badura-Skoda will perform his Piano Concerto, and the radio station will present his *Te Deum* and the posthumous Third Symphony, conducted by Yehudi Menuhin. In Berlin—how wonderful!—Herbert von Karajan will direct the Furtwängler Memorial Concert. It will be a premiere, since he had never, up to now, conducted a concert in honor of Furtwängler.

Ibykus: Are you planning anything for your husband's 100th birthday?

Elisabeth Furtwängler: No, I'm not planning anything myself. I collect. If I were to plan something, that would be contrary to Furtwängler: "My wife may not expose herself to rebuff."

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