

## Ludwig Weber Tribute

**WAGNER *Parsifal*** • Rudolf Moralt, cond; Günther Treptow (*Parsifal*); Martha Mödl (*Kundry*); Ludwig Weber (Gurnemanz); Paul Schöffler (*Amfortas*); Hans Braun (*Titirel*); Hermann Uhde (*Klingsor*); Ch of the Vienna Staatsoper; Vienna S & C • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES 1195-4 (249:33) Live: Vienna 10/1/1948

& **WAGNER *Götterdämmerung***: Act I excerpt. Hilde Konetzni (sop); Herbert Janssen (bar); Ludwig Weber (bs). *Parsifal. Good Friday Scene*. Hans Knappertsbusch, cond; Carl Hartmann (ten); Ludwig Weber (bs). Live: 1942

**Ken Meltzer**  
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A Heritage Series release from Immortal Performances (IP) is based upon an October 1, 1948 Vienna broadcast performance of Wagner's *Parsifal*, conducted by Rudolf Moralt. That broadcast has been issued on the MYTO (4 MCD 954.136) and Walhall (WLCD0122) labels. William Youngren reviewed the MYTO version in the May/June 1996 *Fanfare* (19:5). He proclaimed it "a splendid issue, of great interest to all Wagner collectors." Youngren was enthusiastic about the contributions of all the participants. The only shortcoming he found was with the Kundry, Hilde Konetzni, and her difficulty with the topmost notes in Act II. Youngren concluded: "yet again, let me encourage you to get this set." In his Recording Notes for this Heritage Series release, IP's Richard Caniell testifies to the strengths of the 1948 Moralt *Parsifal*, and in particular, the unsurpassed Gurnemanz of Ludwig Weber: "so how to explain the noble, shining beauty of his Gurnemanz? He has cleansed his tone of the steel of his evil intent and revealed, in a voice of astonishing brilliance, a warmly tender clarity of expression, marvelous in diction, that surpasses all the Gurnemanz performances he gave at Bayreuth from 1951 onward. There is in Weber's tone not only a profound humanity, but a spiritual radiance that is breathtaking. Notwithstanding, his Gurnemanz is very human, very real and communicates a stature that comports with the height of Wagner's musical conception." But for Caniell, Konetzni's Kundry represented an insurmountable flaw: "I greatly disliked Anny Konetzni's Kundry, especially in Act II. She's not so bad in Act I, but her dominance in Act II throws me out of the musical experience."

In previous Heritage Series releases, Caniell has crafted a synthesis of various performances to recreate actual performances of the artists' time, and/or to approach the ideal in the realization of a particular work. For his Heritage Series version of the Moralt 1948 *Parsifal*, Caniell decided to replace Konetzni with the superb dramatic soprano Martha Mödl. She is also the Kundry in the iconic 1951 Bayreuth *Parsifal* (Decca) led by Hans Knappertsbusch. Weber is the Gurnemanz in that performance as well. But given the contrast between the closely-miked acoustic of the 1948 Vienna broadcast, and that of the resonant Bayreuth Festspielhaus, Caniell needed to employ another source for Mödl's Kundry. That source proved

to be another broadcast, by the RAI Rome, on April 1, 1956, conducted by Eugen Jochum (Weber is once again Gurnemanz). The Klingsor in the 1956 RAI is Hermann Uhde, who is also in the cast of the 1951 Bayreuth. Uhde replaces Alfred Vogel (Klingsor, 1948 Vienna) in this IP Heritage Series release. By Caniell's own admission, incorporating Mödl's 1956 performance into the 1948 Vienna *Parsifal* was a lengthy, painstaking, and intense process. Kundry engages in a considerable amount of dialogue, thereby creating the potential for jarring contrast between each character's lines. But emblematic of his work, Caniell has achieved a remarkable continuity and flow in the composite portions of this release. The acoustic, volume, and color are all admirably matched, and convincing. The overall sound quality is the equivalent of contemporary studio recordings. If you are seeking a version of the 1948 *Parsifal* as crafted by Richard Caniell and IP, do not hesitate.

The 1951 Bayreuth *Parsifal* is a worthy document of Ludwig Weber's greatness in the role of Gurnemanz. But I agree with Richard Caniell that the 1948 Vienna broadcast demonstrates those strengths to even greater advantage. Weber is in fresher and more beautiful voice in 1948. And the more intimate confines of the broadcast studio provide the foundation for an interpretation that reflects a lieder singer's attention to detail and characterization. As Caniell observes, this is an arrestingly human and sympathetic Gurnemanz. A masterful performance. Tenor Günther Treptow also excels in the title role. He, too, is in fine voice from start to finish. And it's a true heldentenor, with rich lower and middle registers (Treptow began as a baritone), and a secure top, albeit one with a slightly "bottled-up" sound that reminds me a bit of Richard Tauber. Treptow, a fine singing actor, is convincing in his portrayal of Parsifal's transformation. The two imports from the Rome broadcast, familiar exponents of their roles, are decided assets. Mödl is not quite as vocally fresh as in Bayreuth 1951, but she is still in total command of her role, both in voice and dramatic bearing. Hermann Uhde's Klingsor embodies the singer's familiar dark tone, biting delivery, and relishing of the character's unrelenting evil. As Amfortas, Paul Schöffler sings in a forthright manner, avoiding the unrelenting self-pity many interpreters bring to the part. Nonetheless both the character's pain and nobility are never in question. Hans Braun, a heldenbaritone of some note, brings a refreshingly secure and attractive vocalism to the role of Titurel.

Rudolf Moralt, chief conductor of the Vienna State Opera from 1940 until his death in 1958, leads with a sure and knowing hand. Moralt was a superb conductor, and one who well understood the importance of flow and contrast in an operatic performance. This is a *Parsifal* that never gets bogged down, one that also fulfills the score's climactic moments. I've never encountered a conductor who equals Knappertsbusch in realizing the grandeur, beauty, and spirituality of *Parsifal*, but Moralt brings his own strengths to the score. The Vienna Symphony Orchestra while not the equal of its Philharmonic counterparts, acquits itself well in a work that demands the utmost in concentration. Members of the Vienna State Opera Chorus enhance the quality of this production. As welcome bonuses (placed at the start to allow for uninterrupted flow of the complete opera),

IP provides excerpts spotlighting Weber's Hagen in *Götterdämmerung* (from the 1937 "Dream" *Ring*), and once again his Gurnemanz, this time from a 1942 Deutsches Oper performance, led by Knappertsbusch. Weber is excellent in both, and the opportunity to hear him at an earlier stage of his career testifies to the longevity and consistency of his artistry. The Heritage Series release includes two lavish booklets, including a detailed plot synopsis and a wealth of insights both from William Russell and Caniell on Wagner's *Parsifal* and the featured performance. IP's version of the 1948 Vienna *Parsifal* offers some intriguing alternatives, and much to savor. Above all, there is perhaps Weber's finest realization of Gurnemanz. Recommended.

Five stars: Ludwig Weber's magisterial Gurnemanz in a Heritage Series *Parsifal*