ERIK TUXEN

THE DANISH STATE RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



MAHLER · WAGNER

FIRST RELEASE

Gustav Mahler. Symphony No. 4. (Copenhagen 1956)
Richard Wagner. The abridged Parsifal. (Copenhagen 1955)

dana cord

Erik Tuxen (1902-1957)
Three conductors stand out in Danish musical life during the years after the Second World War: Launy Grøndahl (1886–1960), Thomas Jensen (1898–1963) and Erik Tuxen (1902–1957). All three were closely associated with the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra, then one of Europe's leading orchestras. Furthermore, they all played an important part in bringing Carl Nielsen's music to an international audience through concerts, foreign tours and pioneering gramophone recordings, but Erik Tuxen, who appeared as guest conductor with the Philadelphia Orchestra and other orchestras across the Americas, and guest conducted in several European countries, was the only one to establish an international career as a conductor. He was also the only one of the three to record non-Nordic repertoire for an international record label (Decca recordings of Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony, Tchaikovsky's Marche slave and Liszt's Hungarian Rhapsody No. 4).

Erik Oluf Tuxen was born in Mannheim on 4 July 1902 to Danish parents. The family, however, returned to Denmark, where Tuxen graduated from Odense Cathedral School in 1920. Immediately afterwards, he began studying architecture, completing his studies three years later. By this time, however, it had become clear to Tuxen, who had already displayed considerable musical gifts as a child, that his true calling lay in music. Having begun his musical studies in Denmark, Tuxen continued them in Germany and Austria, and in 1927 he joined the opera in Lübeck as répétiteur and assistant Kapellmeister. Two years later, he returned to Denmark and took up engagements at various Copenhagen theatres, including productions of Kurt Weill's *Die Dreigroschenoper* and Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf.* These two operas, both profoundly influenced by jazz, point towards an important aspect of Tuxen's musical personality. Between 1933 and 1936 he directed a jazz orchestra consisting of many of Denmark's leading jazz musicians, achieving remarkable popular success and becoming one of the country's best-known musical personalities.

Yet his enthusiasm for jazz never diminished his commitment to the classical repertoire. A turning point came in 1936, when Danish State Radio announced a competition for a conductorship with the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra, and Tuxen entered and secured the appointment. He was to become one of the conductors most closely associated with the orchestra, and apart from two years during the German occupation, when he had to flee to Sweden – his wife was of Jewish descent, and he himself was regarded by the Germans as anti-German – he remained with the orchestra until his untimely death 21 years later.

Apart from his pioneering advocacy of Carl Nielsen (and of jazz), Erik Tuxen's name became particularly associated with brilliant and technically demanding orchestral repertoire (not least Russian and French music) and with modern music, including works by contemporary Danish composers. The technical skill and flair with which he tackled these tasks seem to have fostered the impression that the Austro-German classics were not his natural domain. An excellent complete cycle of the Brahms symphonies (DACOCD 1011) tells a very different story, however, and the present release, featuring Tuxen in works by Wagner and Mahler, shows the same natural affinity for the music of the German cultural tradition, to which he was connected through both his upbringing and his education.

In the post-war years, Danish musical life was strongly dominated by the tradition of Carl Nielsen. The Master himself was no longer among the living, but zealous gatekeepers continued to uphold his opposition to the overblown excesses of Romanticism and his praise of the wholesome and the unpretentious, and in this respect they were not infrequently *plus royaliste que le roi*. This involved, not least, a pronounced scepticism towards Wagner and his followers and musical heirs.

Mahler's works were therefore performed only sporadically in Denmark – although Carl Nielsen had in fact taken an interest in his music and had at one point even

played his symphonies with a private study group of students – and the Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra had virtually no Mahler tradition. On the other hand, many years of collaboration with Fritz Busch had made the orchestra thoroughly conversant with the German idiom, and their longstanding familiarity with Carl Nielsen's music, with its rural, al fresco character, gave the musicians a natural feel for the folk-inspired elements and evocations of nature in Mahler's musical language.

Tuxen's approach to Mahler's Fourth Symphony – the most pastoral and serene in the composer's symphonic output – displays the same qualities that made his interpretations of the Brahms symphonies so compelling: tempos are swift, with no rhetorical touches and very little rubato, yet thanks to Tuxen's organic phrasing and unfailing sense of melodic flow, the music never sounds hurried, rigid or faceless, but instead takes on a floating, almost balletic quality. This is a far cry from today's prevailing approach to Mahler, with its preference for slower tempos and often demonstrative emphasis on the introspective and neurotic aspects of the music. In his unpretentious, straightforward way, Tuxen is much closer to such notable representatives of an earlier Mahler tradition as Bruno Walter, Eduard van Beinum and Karel Sejna, whose classic recordings of the symphony dating from the early post-war years he may or may not have known; and he holds his own admirably in their company.

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Richard Wagner (1813-1883) first thought of an opera about the figure of Parsifal and about the Holy Grail in April 1857; almost a quarter of a century later, in January 1882, he finished work on the huge score (total playing time about 5 hours); it is his last opera and indeed a crowning achievement. Once again, concept, libretto and music were all his own, and the first performance took place on 26 July 1882 at the

opera house he had built for himself in Bayreuth. 1 January 1914 saw the end of a Bayreuth monopoly on *Parsifal*, and the full stage production at the Royal Danish Theatre in Copenhagen in 1915 was a novelty indeed; the libretto was translated by Julius Lehmann. Today, *Parsifal* ranks as one of the milestones in the history of opera and of classical music, and *Parsifal* is known worldwide through recordings, concert performances as well as stage productions — this, however, was not always the case, and even if heavily abridged and sung in Danish, the Danish State Radio studio production that was broadcast in the afternoon of Palm Sunday April 3 1955 must count as an ambitious and pioneering effort. In 1957 it was aired once more, but since then the tapes holding this remarkable and indeed expensive performance lay in the radio archive for almost three quarters of a century until Danmarks Radio presented it again in 2025 and 2026. . . and now this Danish CD set makes it available worldwide!

In 1955, Harald Krebs, the producer of the abridged Danish-language concert version, had made sure that all the performers in a full-length Parsifal would be represented, ranging from large orchestra, Grail bells, mixed choir, boys' choir, Flower Maidens and supporting roles to, of course, the solo parts. On the other hand, the overall duration of the work had to be curtailed considerably — even the famous quarter-hour-long prelude to the opera was omitted. The abridged version did not, however, present *Parsifal* mainly through a parade of showpieces and highlights; instead, the authoritative and fiery Danish conductor Erik Tuxen, at the helm of a no less spirited Danish State Radio Orchestra and all the singers, led the way on a journey featuring carefully selected excerpts from the monumental score; for today's listeners abroad and even at home the all-Danish group of soloists offer a bonus attraction, namely the belated encounter with 'unknown' Nordic Wagner singers of international calibre.

Richard Wagner's opera *Parsifal* is set in an almost mythical mediaeval Spain and tells the story of a young man, his spiritual journey, and the hardships he must endure before he is ready to stand proud as the new King of the Grail, leading an order of elite knights whose life is centred on safeguarding the Holy Grail, housed in their castle at Monsalvat. The story is structured around the following main elements:

• The ailing king and the knights of the Grail

At the Castle of Monsalvat, King Amfortas is in physical pain and in spiritual torment — a wound in his side refuses to heal : a wound that he sustained when he lost the Holy Spear to Klingsor, who had turned vindictive sorcerer after the Knighthood rejected him. Come Act 3, the Knighthood is weakened, and Titurel, first King of the Grail and the ageing father of King Amfortas, has died; this is because Amfortas in his remorseful despair thinks that he dare no longer take it upon himself to ceremoniously reveal the rejuvenating Grail to them.

• The 'utter fool'

(Act 1) When Gurnemanz, a formidable senior Knight of the Grail, has finished relating to the young squires around him the basic facts of the Monsalvat story so far, Parsifal enters — an errant innocent youth, naïve and ignorant: an 'utter fool' indeed, who does not even know his own name and thinks nothing of having just killed a swan revered by the knights. Gurnemanz, sensing some quality in the boy, decides to test him by allowing him to be present at the Grail ceremony in the castle, where he is even witness to the physical and spiritual pain of King Amfortas (— the concluding parts of Act 1 were omitted in the Danish 1955 concert version; in them, the Grail is revealed, but in the end it becomes clear to to Gurnemanz that Parsifal has failed to understand the significance of what he has just experienced,

and so the ‘utter fool’ is sent packing). Noticeable in Act 1 is an enigmatic wild woman by the name of Kundry — she would seem to belong to many times and places at once, and her relation to the knights, to Amfortas and indeed to Parsifal is ambiguous, troubled.

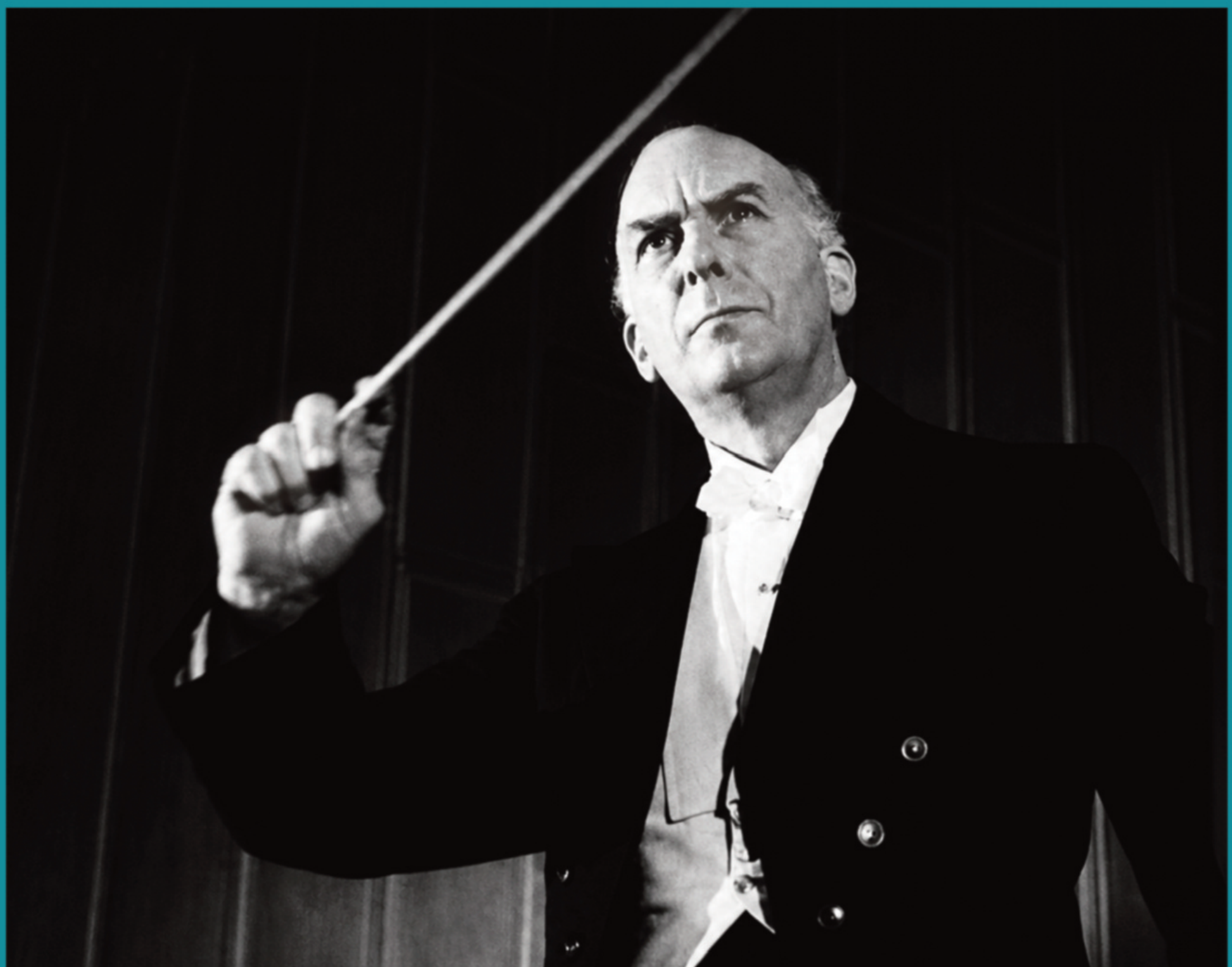
• Temptation and compassion

(Act 2) In the enchanted southerly realm of the sorcerer Klingsor, Kundry — now in the shape of a beautiful temptress— attempts (on Klingsor’s orders) to seduce Parsifal (like she had fatally managed to seduce Amfortas). Cunningly, she first tells Parsifal about his childhood and about his mother, Herzeleide, but when finally she gets to give him the first erotic kiss of his life, Parsifal suddenly feels within his heart the suffering that torments King Amfortas.Through this deep sense of compassion the naïve boy, the utter fool, attains wisdom and rejects temptation.

• Reunion and redemption

(Act 3) In the final minutes of Act 2, Parsifal recovered the Holy Spear and destroyed Klingsor’s demonic world. When, later on, Parsifal returns to Monsalvat, he is a mature but troubled, melancholy knight-errant. Outside the castle, Gurnemanz and Kundry, both of them in an abject state, welcome him back. Gurnemanz now hails Parsifal as the new king, and Parsifal baptizes Kundry, freeing her from her curse. Then, inside the castle, Parsifal touches Amfortas’s wound with the Spear, heals him and procedes to reveal the Grail. The utter fool has grown to become king, protector of the Grail and head of the order of knights at Monsalvat.

Brahms: The Four Symphonies. Erik Tuxen. DACOCD 1011
(Gramophone Editor’s Choice) www.danacord.com



2 CD
ERIK TUXEN · MAHLER 4 · WAGNER PARSIFAL
DACOCD 1024



DACOCD 1024
2 CD

Total playing time:
77:59 + 77:31

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Transferred by
Claus Byrith

Produced by
Jonas Barlyng

Cover design by
Hannah Jørgensen

Executive Producer
Jesper Buhl

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COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

CD 1

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 4 in G major *49:44*

[1] I. Bedächtig, nicht eilen *14:57*
[2] II. In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast *8:19*
[3] III. Ruhevoll, poco adagio *18:09*
[4] IV. Sehr behaglich *8:07*
Karen Heerup, soprano
Live Concert, February 16, 1956
The Danish Radio Concert Hall, Copenhagen

Richard Wagner (1813-1883)

Parsifal

Abridged version sung in Danish
Translated by Julius Lehmann.
Adapted for radio by Harald Krebs

Act 1

[5] "He! Ho! Waldhüter ihr!" *7:41*
[6] "Nach wilder Schmerzensnacht" [from # 18] *20:22*

CD 2

Act 1 continued
[1] "Wirst deiner Sündenthat du inne" [from # 67] *8:57*
[2] "Vom Bade kehrt der König heim" [from # 84] *11:55*
[3] "Mein Sohn Amfortas" [from # 101] *10:29*

Act 2

[4] "Komm! Komm! Holder Knabe" [from # 161] *9:03*
[5] "Ich sah das Kind" [from # 176] *17:36*

Act 3

[6] "Wie dünkt mich doch die Aue" [from 12 before # 256] *9:37*
[7] "Enthüllet den Gral!" [from # 281] *9:29*

Amfortas – Holger Byrding
Titurel – Holger Nørgaard
Gurnemanz – Mogens Wedel
Parsifal – Erik Sjöberg
Klingsor – Niels Bondo
Kundry – Dorothy Larsen
Two Knights of the Grail – Paul Bjerregard, Niels Bondo
Four Squires – Valborg Garde, Sonja Winther Jørgensen, Christen Blanke, André Bech Nielsen
Klingsor's Flowermaidens – Ellen-Margrethe Edlers, Gerda Gilboe, Kate Møller, Christine Philipsen, Edel Andersen, Maja Bærentzen
The Brotherhood of the Knights of the Grail – The Danish State Radio Choir
Youngsters and boys – The Danish State Boys' Choir

Studio production, broadcast live on Palm Sunday, April 3, 1955

The Danish State Radio Symphony Orchestra
Erik Tuxen, conductor

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2 CD