

**WAGNER *Der fliegende Holländer*** • Richard Kraus (cond); Joel Berglund (*Dutchman*); Maria Müller (*Senta*); Franz Völker (*Erik*); Ludwig Hofmann (*Daland*); Bayreuth Festival Ch & O • IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES IPCD 1180-2, mono (2 CDs: 156:53) Live, Bayreuth 7/18/42  
& **WAGNER: *Lohengrin, Bridal Chamber Duet*** • Robert Heger, cond; Franz Völker (*Lohengrin*); Maria Müller (*Elsa*); O of the Staatsoper, Berlin • Live: Berlin, 1942

By **Ken Meltzer**  
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Immortal Performances (IP) presents a complete performance of Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman*, taped from the stage of the Bayreuth Festival on July 18, 1942. For those (like this writer) who are willing to explore musical performances that took place during the height of the Nazi regime, this Bayreuth *Dutchman* is of considerable historic interest. By 1942 the Germans had, for several years, been using magnetic tape to record live performances. The technology, at its best, allowed for sound of quite remarkable dynamic range, color, and depth. On the other hand, loud passages and high notes presented a challenge that sometimes resulted in distortion. The recording of 1942 Bayreuth *Dutchman* as restored by IP, is superb. It rivals commercial recordings of the era, but also captures a rendition that benefits from the frisson of a live performance. And IP has done a fine job of taming the overloading issues I've mentioned. In short, IP's restoration bridges the 80 years that have passed, allowing the listener an opportunity to gain a true sense of the performance and the atmosphere in which it took place.

Heading the cast is the Dutchman of Swedish bass-baritone Joel Berglund. Vocally, Berglund is ideally suited for this demanding role. His dark and focused voice maintains its beauty and power throughout the registers. Berglund also displays remarkable stamina; from a powerful opening monologue to the closing bars, the bass-baritone is in sterling voice. From an interpretive perspective, Berglund does not lack intensity. But he also doesn't display the insight and attention to detail offered by Herbert Janssen in a remarkable 1937 Berlin Radio broadcast (Immortal Performances IP 1051-2) (Reviewed, *Fanfare*, Sept/Oct 2017, 41:1). Still, Berglund's Dutchman impresses on its own terms. We'd certainly be fortunate to encounter such a performance today. But it is soprano Maria Müller who, at least from a dramatic perspective, steals the show. Her Senta is passionate young woman, seething with an intensity that makes her fascination with the Dutchman credible. Müller is in fine voice, too. Both her rich and attractive middle register and brilliant high notes reinforce the image of a young woman teeming with romantic longing. In the 1920s and 30s, Franz Völker possessed one of the most beautiful and secure voices among tenors singing Wagnerian repertoire. By the time of the 1942 Bayreuth *Dutchman*, Völker's tenor had lost some of its bloom and focus. He remains, nonetheless, an ardent Erik, whose pain over the loss of Senta's love is evident. Bass Ludwig Hofmann is a reliable and sonorous Daland, if not especially memorable. The role of the Steersman cries out for a lyric tenor with a voice of beauty and some heft. Erich Zimmerman, so effective as Mime in Wagner's *Ring*, tries his best. Zimmerman sings with energy and feeling, but no one would confuse him with Fritz Wunderlich. At

the time of this performance, conductor Richard Kraus was General Music Director at Halle. He leads a *Dutchman* that may not be subtle, but has ample energy and foreboding.

As an appendix, IP includes the Bridal Chamber Duet from a 1942 Berlin State Opera performance of *Lohengrin*, conducted by Robert Heger. Völker is heard in the title role, with Müller as the knight's beloved Elsa. Here, Völker is in better voice, though still not possessing the glow and beauty of his earlier years. Nonetheless, *Lohengrin* was one of Völker's finest roles, and he sings here with style and feeling. Müller is again vocally and dramatically first-rate, a marvelous portrait of Elsa's inability to sublimate her curiosity over the knight's identity. The recorded sound is again excellent. For the set's final track, IP reprises the opening of Bayreuth, 1942 *The Flying Dutchman* Overture, complete with a horn "clam" that is mended for the complete opera restoration. I've heard worse flubs, but I can also understand why IP corrected it. The booklet includes Dewey Faulkner's comments on the performances, a discussion of Wagner's *Dutchman*, and a discussion of the technical resources employed by the Germans for sound recording. There is a detailed plot synopsis of *The Flying Dutchman*, Richard Caniell's Recording Notes, and artist photos and bios. A fascinating document, made all the more compelling by its excellent recorded sound. Recommended to those interested in the featured singers, as well as in the history of Bayreuth.

Five stars: A fascinating wartime *Dutchman* from Bayreuth, in excellent sound