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Who played Bruckner's *Adagio* (from his *Seventh Symphony*)?

Research on German radio programs on May 1, 1945 with the report of Hitler's death

In the spring of 1945 there was not much left of the dense network of the *Großdeutscher Rundfunk*: all radio stations and transmitters east of Berlin were in the hands of Soviet troops who had met the Allied American troops near Torgau on April 25, 1945. In southern Germany, things looked just as bleak: almost all major transmitters were destroyed, some blown up or out of order. Only in the north, in the Hamburg-Flensburg region, did some stations still broadcast the centrally produced "Reichsprogramm" for some time. What also seemed to function reasonably well was the close-meshed radio cable network with which transmitters and studios were connected via the headquarters in Berlin, Haus des Rundfunks in Masurenallee. In 1943, the total length was about 87,000 km (55,000 miles). Berlin's Haussender in Tegel, the 100 kW "Reichssender Berlin", had been under the control of Soviet soldiers since April 24, 1945.

Berlin, Haus des Rundfunks, Tuesday, May 1, 1945

The Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft (RRG), for many years the loud mouthpiece of the *Third Reich*, spread a final series of lies and propaganda from the Berlin Masurenallee in the evening of May 1 and over night into May 2. However, it is not even certain which stations were still broadcasting this last episode. Neither is it certain who was responsible for the program or who wrote and edited the news of the day, namely the news of Hitler's suicide, which had already taken place a full day before the start of the program. It must have been chief speaker Elmer Bantz who read the message between 22:30 h and 23:00 h and repeated it around midnight. As far as the wording and the further transmission sequence are concerned, only the final sign-off between 0:50 h and 1:50 h has been passed on with some degree of reliability. The station manager gave the then seventeen-year-old Richard Baier a piece of paper which he had to read out and thus completed his service with the RRG:

"Thus, the Großdeutsche Rundfunk ends its transmission sequence. We greet all Germans and commemorate the brave German soldiers, on land, at sea, and in the air. The Führer is dead, long live the Reich."

After that: Radio silence.

Richard Baier and some colleagues managed an adventurous, life-threatening escape. A few hours later, on May 2, 1945, Soviet troops occupied the radio station. Even in Baier's final sign-off, the first sentence proved to be wrong, at least in Hamburg and Bremen, among others. British troops shut down the last station broadcasting Reich megalomania, "Reichssender Flensburg," in mid-May.

Reichssender Hamburg, Tuesday, May 1, 1945

As an exception, the Funkhaus Hamburg (Northern Germany) remained largely intact beyond the end of the war, as did the close-by 100 kW transmitter Billwerder-Moorfleet with its auxiliary transmitters, including Flensburg, and the Reichssender Bremen, which was hardly known in Germany but was all the more present in England, and which launched a Nazi propaganda service with the station announcement "*Germany calling! Here are the Reichssender Hamburg, station Bremen*". In order to hide the location of this radio station, the actual name "Großrundfunksender Osterloog" was not mentioned

However technically accomplished, the better known of two radio broadcasts about Hitler's death was broadcast via the Reichssender Hamburg and Bremen, the announcements about "Germany Calling" were broadcast in English. As far as is known, the actual sequence of transmissions, which lasted about one and a half hours, was documented in detail only by the British daily newspaper *The Daily Mail*, issues dated May 2, 1945. The newspaper maintained the *Daily Mail Radio Station* as its own listening service for "enemy radio stations."

According to reports by the *Daily Mail* and the *Manchester Guardian* of May 2, 1945, the following is the sequence of events.

21:00 h to 21:30 h: Announcement of an important news item, followed by an unspecified excerpt from Richard Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* and one of the two piano concertos by Carl Maria von Weber (normal playing durations of about 21.5 or 23 min).

21:30 h to 21:40 h: a kind of address to the German people about the meaning and purpose of Berlin's agony. The major theme was:

"With the Führer we are fighting to stem the flood of Bolshevism which threatens to engulf the world."

21:40 h: second announcement of an important news item ("Achtung! Achtung! The German Broadcasting system is going to give an important German Government announcement for the German people."), then from **21:43 h** excerpts from Wagner's operas *Das Rheingold* (Rhinegold) and *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods), probably *Siegfried's funeral march*).

21:57 h: third announcement of the important news, then the second movement (*Adagio*) from Anton Bruckner's Seventh Symphony in E major.

22:25 h: "Abruptly at 10:25 [P.M.] the music stopped" - after about 28 minutes the music transmission stops, triple drum roll, then the 40 second message:

"It is reported from the Führer's headquarters that our Führer Adolf Hitler fell this afternoon in his command post in the Reich Chancellery fighting for Germany until his last breath against Bolshevism. On April 30, the Führer appointed Grand Admiral Dönitz as his successor. The Grand Admiral and successor of the Führer speaks to the German people."

This was followed by an almost seven-minute speech by Karl Dönitz, whom Hitler had appointed as his successor:

"German men and women, soldiers of the German Wehrmacht! Our Führer, Adolf Hitler, has fallen. The German people bowed in deep mourning and reverence. ... The oath you made to the Führer now applies to each and every one of you without further ado to me, as the successor appointed by the Führer. ... German soldiers, do your duty! It is the life of our people that counts."

Mysteriously, Dönitz's speech had been interrupted several times by a ghostly voice, which urgently called on the Germans to go on strike; ultimately, all efforts were in vain.

After that the usual sequence of national anthem (*Deutschlandlied*) and *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, further drum rolls, three minutes of radio silence (transmission pause) and further funeral music – Beethoven's *Eroica* is also mentioned. The program sign-off at 02:00 h (Thursday morning) was:

"We greet our listeners in Germany and abroad, our soldiers at sea, in the field and in the air with the German greeting: Heil Hitler."

What a two-day old, treacherous anachronism!

In retrospect, this episode seems to be more improvised than planned, which speaks for how often the bombastically announced climax was postponed again and again. There is only speculation as to the reasons for this: had attempts been made to connect the last South German stations with Hamburg by means of still functioning sections of the radio pipeline network in order to broadcast the programme as widely and simultaneously as possible, or was the text of Dönitz's speech not yet available or had it still to be recorded? In any case, the *Manchester Guardian* reports that broadcasters in southwest Germany had brought entertainment music during the Hamburg-Bremen programme. The programme was finally interrupted at 22:45 by three drum rolls, followed by the news of the day and Dönitz's speech.

The Hamburg news spokesman is not known; perhaps he would do well to remain anonymous because of his almost ecstatic diction (in view of the circumstances of this rather hypocritical wretched filthy show.). Dönitz was sentenced to ten years imprisonment in the Nuremberg Trial of the main war criminals for conducting wars of aggression and war crimes, in which he fully participated. And the three minutes of Funkstille – for each of the presumably 60 million deaths of this war, a memorial period of just three microseconds remained.

Who played Bruckner's Adagio in the pre-program?

What is written about Anton Bruckner's Seventh Symphony rarely gets by without the remark that its second movement, *Adagio* (*Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam* – Very solemn and very slow), had to be broadcast over the already largely tattered *Großdeutscher Rundfunk* for the supporting programme of the news programme of Hitler's death. The course of the programme, so to conclude from common later depictions, is the as follows: *Reading of the message - address by Dönitz - Bruckner Adagio* – which would have advanced to become official funeral music, so to speak. It is not unusual to find the name Wilhelm Furtwängler at the same time. However, such a mention has nothing to do with established facts.

The actual sequence did not make the Bruckner *Adagio* a prominent feature; it only ran in the opening act, or better: filling program. The pair of terms "Bruckner – *Adagio*" thus condensed, so to speak, reflexively to the view formulated partly as an assumption, partly as a fact, that it was Furtwängler's recording of April 1, 1942 (still known today), without taking into account the available in-house recordings of the RRG. The fact that other pieces of music were broadcast in addition to the *Adagio*, let alone who their interpreters were, seems to be completely unknown. Such rudimentary descriptions, occasionally mixing the Berlin and Hamburg-Bremen broadcasts, may be due to (and in part excuseable) the fact that there is apparently no extant German-language representation of the broadcast sequences.

Daily Mail 4 PM

The most dramatic news of the war broken by the German radio

'HITLER DEAD-DOENITZ APPOINTED FÜHRER'

Admiral tells Germans: 'The fight goes on.' Himmler ignored

THE WATER OF BRITAIN TAKES OVER

FOOD SHIPS INTO HOLLAND, AND SURRENDER BEGINS ON 3 FRONTS

FOOD FOR DUTCH

DOENITZ CANNOT HOLD REICH TOGETHER

THE WATER OF BRITAIN TAKES OVER

German army scurries out of Denmark

Night tram stop: London strike moves

HITLER IS DEAD

THEY DON'T CLEAN YOUR TEETH RIGHT

Play Safe Use COLGATE

ARMIES ENTER AUSTRIA

Daily Mail 4 PM

HITLER DEAD

News the world's been praying for broken last night by German radio

THE LAST PICTURE

Achtung! 90 minutes of radio suspense — and Wagner

Millions of Britons spread word with telephone calls

THEY DON'T CLEAN YOUR TEETH RIGHT

Play Safe Use COLGATE

The front pages of two issues of the Daily Mail (both "4 PM") of 2 May 1945

WAGNERIAN CONCERT OF DEATH

90 minutes of radio suspense

THE 90 minutes before its announcement of Hitler's death last night were the most dramatic of the war for the German radio. Stand-by warnings were repeated continuously.

While the world waited in suspense, the solemn music of Wagner rolled out from the last stations of the Reich.

And the "Achtung" interruptions came with fanfares and the roll of drums

From Bremen, in English,

From
THE DAILY MAIL
RADIO STATION

listeners were told that an announcement by the German Government would be broadcast at 9 p.m.

Not since Hitler came to power had that term "German Government" been used over the radio. All major announcements were made "by the Führer."

From 9 until 9.30 Hamburg Radio was putting over Wagner's "Tannhäuser" and a piano concerto by Weber.

The music was interrupted—"Please stand by for an important announcement. It will be broadcast on this wave-length."

Soon after the music had ended Hamburg began in English—telling the aims for which they had fought, for which Berlin's death-struggle was being waged.

"With the Führer we are fighting to stem the flood of Bolshevism which threatens to engulf the world," said the announcer.

At 9.40 the "Stand-by" warning was given again. This was followed

by Wagner's "Twilight of the Gods."

Once more an announcer came to the microphone, at 9.43, shouting: 'Achtung! Achtung! The German broadcasting system is going to give an important German Government announcement for the German people.'

More music followed, from Wagner's "Rhinegold."

At 9.57 the "Achtung" warning was repeated and the announcer added: "We are now going to play the slow movement of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony" [commemorating the death of Wagner].

Abruptly at 10.25 the music stopped. There came three rolls of the drums—a moment's silence, and then the news of Adolf Hitler's death.

This was followed by the German National Anthem the Horst Wessel song, more drum-rolls, and a three-minute silence.

All German radio stations scrapped the midnight news bulletin and repeated instead the announcement of Hitler's death and the Doenitz proclamation, following it by the playing of Beethoven's "Eroica" Symphony.

FOOTNOTE: Closing down at 2 a.m. to-day, Hamburg radio said: "We greet our listeners in Germany and abroad, and our soldiers at sea, on the ground, and in the air with the German greeting: *Heil Hitler.*"

The course of the evening program of the Reichssender Hamburg on May 1, 1945 according to the *Daily Mail* of May 2, 1945. Obviously due to lack of space, the Dönitz speech is not mentioned here, which is quoted in detail in other articles on this page.

The artistic value of the Furtwängler interpretation is beyond question, but it also has an important technical aspect. The company *Telefunkenplatte* was able, presumably in anticipation of a rental agreement with Tonband GmbH (see below), to test one of the first technically mature Magnetophons (magnetic tape recorders) with high-frequency bias as early as spring 1942. Furtwängler's only studio production during the war is, if not the first, then one of the earliest commercial recordings created with this method. High-frequency bias raised the quality of magnetic tape recordings well above the level of wax disks and thus offered welcome reserves for the following shellac disc production steps. In addition, it was not always possible to prevent the sensitive wax discs from being damaged during the first electroplating, so that no further press dies could be produced for longer runs. For example, it was customary to record each four-minute section – corresponding to the playing time of the shellac record – several times in a row to be on the safe side – at the expense of the musicians in each case. On the other hand, the magnetic tape could be played back as often as desired without any loss of quality. It was therefore sufficient to archive a perfect recording in order to be able to cut wax discs or pressing masters from it again if necessary.

Before the introduction of the LP, continuous recording of longer pieces of music (possibly with two tape recorders and staggered reel changes) was essentially only common practice with radio stations. Commercial recordings, as already mentioned, always had to be interrupted due to the short playing time of each disc side. In order to avoid harsh breaks at the end, minor changes were made to the musical score if necessary. Furtwängler's recording of Bruckner's Adagio demonstrates this working method, of course only on the basis of the original shellac records. Accordingly, a corresponding magnetic tape partial recording had been made for each disc side. Since the *Telefunkenplatte* had rented only one magnetic tape recorder, i.e. could not make any magnetic tape duplicates, it is highly unlikely that exact copies of the "original tape" were circulated. When the long-playing record allowed symphony movements the length of the *Adagio* to be placed without gaps on one side of the record, skilful sound engineers must have used tape copies to remove some of the transition parts, and to cleverly conceal others, thus creating a "continuous" version. This 22'50" long version is also published in various CD editions. - The magnetic tape original of the *Telefunkenplatte* is lost, whether it was removed with the entire stock of press dies shortly before the end of the war to a mine tunnel or was destroyed in the fire of the Singakademie Berlin at the end of November 1943 (with the studio of the *Telefunkenplatte*), does not seem to be able to be determined.

Even though the RRG has demonstrably owned this production on shellac records, it is unlikely that its six record sides have ever been played in the course of a show - at least two sets of records would have been required to achieve uninterrupted playback, since for example the "fifth" and the "sixth" part of the Adagio are on the front and back of the same record. In principle, the RRG could have made a complete copy on magnetic tape for its own use, but there is not the slightest indication of this.

So there are concrete technical arguments to exclude the Furtwängler recording as an "accompanying program" of the Hitler death notice broadcast of May 1, 1945; but they are neither widely understood or known. However, the program sequence sketched above proves that the Adagio ran between 27:57 h and 22:25 h, i.e. for about 27 minutes. Furtwängler, however, needed only 22'50" for his recording - it is about four minutes too short for the transmission time span, and this is further proof that it was another recording. What other versions are possible given the circumstances?

We now must look at a little-known subsidiary of AEG, Tonband GmbH, whose business activity consisted of producing copies, in particular of magnetic tape recording originals of the RRG, the "Urbänder", which were mainly distributed to the Reich broadcasters "so that the foreign broadcasters [outside Berlin] are in a position to produce their own programmes in the event of line problems". Hamburg has been one of the receivers since the beginning of this practice. Since the Funkhaus was largely undamaged at the end of the war, the corresponding tape copies must have been readily available.

The director of the Funkhaus Hamburg was now free, if necessary, to choose between two current, complete RRG magnetic tape recordings of the Seventh Symphony of Bruckner, which had been produced in 1943 and 1944. The typical history of the spring 1944 recording of Georg Ludwig Jochum is easy to trace; the documents can be found in a collection of files which is one of the most important sources in Furtwängler biographies. The second candidate is Karl Böhm's production from summer 1943, published in many later editions on LP and CD.

Georg Ludwig Jochum, April 1944

The first candidate is thus the magnetic tape recording with the "*Linzer Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester des Deutschen Rundfunks*" under Georg Ludwig Jochum, recorded on April 6, 1944 at the Reichssender Vienna. The RRG's own production was first broadcast on Hitler's 55th birthday (April 20, 1944) - the orchestra was composed at his request – as part of a Führer birthday transmission (*Führergeburtstagssendung*). Hitler was unavailable that evening because of a reception for the supreme Wehrmacht leadership, which is why the initial aim was to repeat the programme at a time when "*the Führer must have the opportunity to listen*". When such an appointment could not be found, Hans Fritzsche, "Head of Radio Broadcasting" at the Goebbels Ministry, arranged for a copy of the recording (from the RRG holdings) consisting of five individual volumes to be sent by

courier from Berlin to the Berghof on June 17, 1944. There was a magnetic tape system in Hitler's vicinity on which such tapes could be played (the magnetophone K 5 was a gift from Goebbels on April 20, 1942. On Hitler's penultimate birthday he sent a copy of the Furtwängler recording of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra). Hitler could therefore have heard the Jochum recording at the Berghof before returning to the Wolfsschanze headquarters on July 14, 1944.

The Linz recording was demonstrably broadcast on radio on 4 July 1944, so, like other "Linzer recordings" of the time, it was available at least as a copy in Berlin and, according to the distribution key of Tonband GmbH, also in Hamburg. Unfortunately the magnetic tapes are lost. If Jochum did not significantly change his individual tempi, a radio recording from 1969 could be decisive: he completed the *Adagio* at that time in a speedy 20'17". This considerably reduces the probability that his 1944 recording was used.

Karl Böhm, summer 1943

Karl Böhm performed Bruckner's Seventh Symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic on 21 August 1942 in the Salzburg Festspielhaus and on 19 and 20 December 1942 in Vienna; these performances were not recorded. However, his recording of June 4 and 5, 1943, also in Vienna, obviously a Studio production, for which two recording days were scheduled (thus no concert repetition as in December 1942; Böhm did not replay the Seventh Symphony in concerts until 1953).

The *Adagio* is recorded at a sustained tempo (*very solemn and slow*, as Bruckner states) and with 27'30" is one of the longer recordings of this movement. The "original tapes" of the RRG have been lost, but no less than three sets of copies (five tapes each with a tape speed of 77 cm/s) have been preserved, all from Tonband GmbH. Only recently has it become apparent that one of the copy tapes has a technical error. With this copy, the *Adagio* only takes a total of 26'42", 48 seconds less than the correct time.

Explanation: Tape recorders at that time could only process tape lengths of up to 1,000 m (3,300 ft, corresponding to a maximum recording time of 21 minutes). This means that a second machine had to take over at a suitable point – here, in this case, during the general pause, at the score letter R – and the movement was thus divided into two tapes. The error occurred when copying the first (longer) part of the tape, ultimately resulting in a pitch jump of just under a semitone downwards when changing to the second part of the tape.

This is not totally unheard of. Assuming that the "master machine" with the original tape runs at the nominal tape speed, but the "slave" runs a little slower, the copied tape length is shorter than that of the original. When that tape is played on a magnetic tape device that runs at the desired speed: the copy is played back in a shorter time, and with a higher pitch. In retrospect, it is difficult to say whether this is due to fluctuations in mains voltage and/or mains frequency during the war, or whether the fault is due to mechanical reasons, or improper maintenance of the machines.

As the error-free, i.e. "longer" versions of the "Böhm-Adagio" from 1943 show, obviously only a partial edition of the copies is affected by the pitch error. And so one could also dismiss the outlier if a majority of the later publications had not obviously come from "shorter" copies, with an obvious pitch jump in the last third of the movement.

In addition, the time difference raises the question of the provenance of the different magnetic tape copies and thus of the entire traditional RRG inventory. Could it be that not only the Zentralschallarchiv in the Berlin Funkhaus Masurenallee was plundered, but also the holdings of the Reichssender Königsberg, Breslau or Leipzig, which were all on the distribution list of Tonband GmbH, and fell into the hands of the Soviet army?

Be that as it may: according to the progress report in the Hamburg broadcast of 1 May 1945, between the announcement of the Bruckner *Adagio* at 21:57 h and the following main news at 22:25 h, about 27 to 28 minutes elapse between the announcement of the Bruckner *Adagio* and the following main news. Böhm's recording, almost four minutes longer than Furtwängler's version, would fit seamlessly into this time span. Whether the choice of words "Abruptly at 10.25 the music stopped" means that the recording ended regularly, was faded out or stopped harshly will probably not be clarified further.

Conclusion

In view of the partly uncertain documentation situation, some statements of this text must be put up for discussion, at best it will give rise to further research. With probability bordering on certainty, however, it can be ruled out that Wilhelm Furtwängler, of all people, contributed to the sound backdrop of one of the most macabre RRG programmes. This also helps to refute the undertones that seem to rewrite this non-event at Furtwängler's expense in view of the problematic relationship between regime and conductor. The renown and artistic value of his interpretation alone are not sufficient for blind attributions; with a manageable amount of research, it would have been possible to avoid misstatements that would have been easy to state more truthfully.

All this may be too much of an attention-getter for a megalomaniac closing event of *Großdeutscher Rundfunk*. Confronted with reality, hubris comes to light: in Hamburg, nobody knows how many dead people still lie under the rubble after the firestorm of July 1943; trains with prisoners from concentration camps are directed to Flens-

burg, where Grand Admiral Dönitz acts as successor to the Führer; Speer and other Nazi leaders, in a newly dressed wardrobe or uniform, believe they can continue the thousand-year Reich; Himmler poisons himself; and, further south, Hermann Göring seriously believes he can negotiate with American officers from the assumed position of power, apparently in denial about the reality of the situation. The shameless propaganda of a radio broadcast full of distorted facts reflects the unintentionally ambiguous decision of the director to search *Götterdämmerung* of all places and then select *Siegfried's funeral march*. If it were Wagner, Loge's final lines at the end of *Das Rheingold* would be more appropriate to this catastrophic situation:

*Now behold them hasten to their end,
while they fancy themselves immortal!
I feel ashamed
to share in their actions.
A burning temptation
to flare into blazes
builds a lust in my heart
to burn those up
who had once made me tame,
rather than blindly
die with the blind—
although they are the most godlike gods!
I think that is the thing!
I'll give it some thought.
Who knows what I'll do?*

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*Loge's final lines are a compilation of three translations:
Stewart Robb in Metropolitan Opera Das Rheingold Libretto, G. Shirmer 1960;
Deeple: <https://www.deepl.com/translator>; and
Libretto from Decca Das Rheingold CD set 414101-2 (c. 1958)*