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ERIKA
THOMAS MANN

1550 SAN REMO DRIVE
PACIFIC PALISADES, CALIFORNIA
December 16th, 1948

Dear Walter Winchell.

Although we've all accustomed ourselves to nasty surprises, the engagement by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra of Professor, Staatsrat, Kultursenator Wilhelm Fuchtwaengler comes as a real shock. You are - I am sure - familiar with the Maestro's Nazi past. Even so, I wish to make quite certain that you are aware of all the facts involved.

Following his ill-fated quarrel with Goebbels in 1933/34, Fuchtwaengler gave in - but completely; signed a declaration of loyalty to the "Fuehrer", and from then on served the regime to the best of his considerable abilities. Nor, in doing so, did he limit himself to the "ordinary" German acts of commission and omission under Nazism. That he never played anything composed by a Jew or otherwise "undesirable"; that he dismissed his Jewish musicians, as well as anyone frowned at by his Minister (Goebbels); that he abused his baton on the occasion of Hitler's birthday at the Nuernberg "Partei-Tag" (in 1937); all this was just the usual routine and since he had chosen to stay in the "Third Reich", Herr Fuchtwaengler could hardly have helped it. The Berlin Philharmonic Society, incidentally, was unable to pay the exorbitant fees which he demanded, and Goebbels himself had to provide for a special fund to keep him happy.

This, too, one might (though I don't !) find forgivable. What makes him outstanding in infamy is a number of deeds which he didn't have to do at all and which testify to the assiduity with which he sought to oblige his bosses. Thus, he led the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra when it came to celebrating the "Anschluss". He conducted in Prague soon after that city had fallen. He performed in Paris and in occupied Norway, and, generally speaking, permitted himself to be made the Nazi Reich's number one cultural propagandist. Dr. Goebbels, when reminded of Fuchtwaengler's initial unruliness, replied: "Forget it! The man is far too valuable; in fact, he is the best advertiser of our Kultur!"

In Austria, Fuchtwaengler held the position of "Cultural Envoy"; his department was referred to, officially, as "Dienststelle Fuchtwaengler" (a "Dienststelle" being something directly connected with the government); and his offices adjoined those of Gauleiter Buerkel.

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In spite of all this, Fuchtwängler has, of course, been acquitted by a German de-nazification court. You may, or may not, have seen the statement in which he pleaded innocent. Whatever he had done - he said - he had done for Germany. For, never would he have dreamed of cowardly fleeing the fatherland in the hour of her need. Etc. pp. Well, Germany was splendidly off right up to "Stalingrad", and what the pet of Chicago really wouldn't have dreamed of doing, was to quit in protest against the Nazis when all was going swell. But now that things aren't so blooming any longer the patriot prepares to depart. - So much for him.

Why, however, we should let him come is beyond me. Won't you do something about it? Chicago, after all, is an important bridge-head. Bruno Walter is getting old and before long the all-important New York position will be vacant. Once Hitler's court musician has been permitted to establish himself in this country, he will get that position as surely as his name is mud.

Please forgive this letter which is quite probably superfluous. If I know you at all you won't let this thing happen without an impressive struggle. But then, as I said before, I just wanted to make certain.

Yours as ever cordially

P.S. In the German-Jewish weekly "Aufbau" (New York), I find the following relevant statement which General Robert A. McClure, then Chief of Information Control Division, made but two years ago: "It is an undeniable fact that Fuchtwängler has prominently identified himself with Nazi Germany. By permitting the party to make him its tool he gave a certain respectability to the circle of men who today in Nuernberg stand accused of crimes against humanity." (Re-translated from the German.)



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