Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886-1954)
Conductor
‘Furtwangler’ (by Bradleigh Stockwell)

1. 1933 – Goebbels assumed responsibility for the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

2. Goering (minister of the interior) named Furtwangler a “Prussian State Counselor”

3. In April 1934 wrote an article in defense of composer Paul Hindemith (whose music was declared “degenerate”)

4. As a result, he resigned from his positions (including RMK VP) except his position as the “Prussian State Counselor”.

5. In 1935 returned to conducting through a deal with Goebbels that he would work as a freelance without an official position, and never to have to accept the political position or perform in any state function.

6. The Nazis threatened to imprison his mother and disband the Berlin Phil. Exploited his fear that his art would not be understood outside of Germany, and if he were to leave, he would be barred from returning to Germany.

7. 1935 – accepted the offer from the NY Phil. However, reports that he would be reappointed as the Berlin Opera turned the public in NY against him.

8. Refused to sign contract with Aryan-only clauses. When ordered to replace his Jewish concertmaster, threatened to cancel his concerts.

9. Refused to join the Nazi party and give the Nazi salute. Did not acknowledge Hitler in concerts. Never began a concert with the Nazi anthem. Helped musicians at risk to leave Germany.

10. When the Berlin Phil was to be “Aryanized”, he met with Hitler. However, that did not help.

11. In 1945 was targeted for arrest by the Gestapo. Escaped to Switzerland.

12. During the denazification process, said that he had to cooperate with the government in order to work against it within the system.

13. “The concern that my art was used for propaganda, had to yield to the greater concert that German music be preserved.”

14. Faced only minor charges of collaboration. He was fully acquitted.

15. The NY Times published editorials that the charges against him had been proven.

16. 1949 – was offered to be the director of the Chicago Symphony. Famous Jewish soloists warned that they would boycott any orchestra that engaged him.

17. “Does Thomas Mann [who was critical of Furtwängler’s actions] really believe that in ‘the Germany of Himmler’ one should not be permitted to play Beethoven? Could he not realize that people never needed more, never yearned more to hear Beethoven and his message of freedom and human love, than precisely these Germans, who had to live under Himmler’s terror? I do not regret having stayed with them.”