

HERBERT VON KARAJAN



Bach · The Art of Fugue

Herbert von Karajan was born in Salzburg on 5 April 1908, the second son of a music-loving surgeon. He attended his first opera in 1914 and began studying piano at the Salzburg Mozarteum with Franz Ledwinka. He made his debut as a prodigy at age 5, when he played Mozart on the piano at a charity concert. He gave up piano during his teens and took up conducting. He entered the Mozarteum to study conducting with Bernhard Paumgartner and graduated in 1927 with distinction and began training as a conductor at the Vienna College of Music to work with Franz Schalk. His first orchestral concert as a conductor at the Mozarteum in Salzburg on 22 January 1929, drew thunderous applause and critical acclaim. Karajan's father hired the Mozarteum Orchestra especially for the occasion. In the audience was the artistic director of the Stadttheater in Ulm, who invited Karajan to audition as a conductor at his theatre. Karajan was soon appointed principal Kapellmeister in Ulm. Over the next five years Karajan learned scores and was inspired by visits to Bayreuth and an appearance by Toscanini in Vienna, whom he considered his idol. In 1935, Karajan became music director in Aachen, making him the youngest general music director in Germany and through his political connections and growing reputation began to conduct the Vienna Philharmonic at the Vienna State Opera (1937) and the Prussian State Orchestra at the Berlin State Opera (1939). He made his debut at Milan's Teatro alla Scala in 1938 and became widely known in Europe through guest-conducting stints in France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Scandinavia. Although Karajan never involved himself in any explicit political affairs, he profited from the musical world's re-organisation under Hitler. On the other side of the musicians' spectrum were Jewish artists who were famous, but that could no longer continue their work in the Third Reich. While Karajan and others certainly profited from their political opportunism, some of the world's most famous conductors as Oskar Fried, Bruno Walter and Otto Klemperer, all working in Berlin in 1933, were, despite their popularity, dismissed from their positions and hounded out of the country. Germany was thus deprived of some of its best artists, who had worked in Germany for years. The departure of such high-ranking



artists was a serious blow for the Berlin Philharmonic that had worked with those conductors numerous times in the past. But while German culture was deprived of some of its major cultural exponents, Austria remained a de-facto sovereign state until 1938 and experienced the arrival of numerous German artists and intellectuals who were forced or voluntarily chose to leave the Reich. While Berlin and the Philharmonic, hence, were faced with the departure of Jewish artists, Vienna and the city's philharmonic was the momentary profiteer that welcomed some of the best artists that the 20th century had seen. Karajan's exact role of the conductor in the Third Reich is still somewhat of a mystery. Previously, many saw him as apolitical, but documents from his early past speak a

different language: There are documents that show that Karajan even joined the Nazi party twice. By the Salzburg membership in 1933 he received membership number 1607525. It has been argued that this membership was not valid since Karajan only paid the administration fee, but not the membership fees he was supposed to. When Austria banned the party, Karajan went to Germany where he was given full party membership in March 1935, this time in Aachen, Germany, where he received membership number 3430914. The "Reichsschatzmeisterei" of the NSDAP in Munich discovered Karajan's dual membership and declared the initial membership invalid. The second membership was then retrospectively dated as May 1, 1933. In 1939 von Karajan led a performance of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger* that was a total failure. Hitler, in the audience, took this as a personal affront and purportedly never forgave him. Hitler allegedly said

that he would no longer go to the Staatsoper when Karajan was on the podium. Karajan remained in Aachen as general music director, until he was dismissed in the 1941/42 season allegedly because he was there too rarely. He was informed of this decision while in Rome on a tour with the Berlin State Opera. In 1942 von Karajan violated Nazi dictum by marrying his second wife Anita Gutermann, the heiress to a textile fortune who was burdened with a Jewish grandfather, a woman of Jewish ancestry. As a result he was dismissed from the party and Karajan's career in Germany was a shambles – and often a dangerous shambles at that – as he conducted a handful of contracted concerts in bomb-blitzed Berlin with the Prussian State Orchestra whilst trying to find work. In 1944 he conducted the George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra in Bucharest (January), the Paris Radio Symphony Orchestra (April/May) and the Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester des Grossdeutschen Rundfunks in Linz (July and December). Karajan's activities during this period are obscured by his own privacy and lack of records. He apparently fled to Italy with his wife in 1944 and remained there until the war ended. Following World War II, Karajan underwent de-Nazification. For more than a year he was refused classification as a conductor by the Occupation government. In January 1946, however, he led the Vienna Philharmonic in three concerts. Henry Alter, stationed in Vienna after his initial months in Berlin, admitted of the denazification of both Karajan and Furtwängler: *"It was an unsolvable problem. Every person who had heard Karajan once make music knew that if one did not allow such a person to make music, one would be punishing oneself and not him. Under these conditions it was really not possible to handle Karajan in any way fairly or justly."* Alter's comments underscore the seemingly contradictory manner in which the Information Control Division (ICD) handled these denazification proceedings, as both men returned to the stage within two years of the War's end. Ultimately, the Americans did not want to lose Karajan from their zone. As one of the most famous musicians in Germany, the ICD recognized they would make better allies than enemies. By October 1947, all bans had been lifted, and he was free to perform and conduct

at will and gave four concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic. But there it is documented, that as late as April 1949 in a letter from the Zonal Office of Information Services in Hamburg, the office of the Cultural Relations Branch explicitly stressed that Karajan's denazification, which was completed in 1947 in Austria was not valid for Germany. Lucerne and Milan were the first placed outside his native Austria to invite him to perform. Some historians believe that he deliberately lied in order to ensure his denazification. Otto Klemperer criticized Karajan for "making his career at the expense of other musicians who were persecuted for rejecting the Nazis." The Nazi affiliation haunted him throughout his life, causing famous Jewish musicians including Heifetz, Rubinstein and Horowitz to refuse to perform with him. In any case, his career continued on and he quickly solidified his position as the continent's rising star. He became music director of La Scala in 1950 and added the London Philharmonia Orchestra in 1952. By 1952, Furtwängler had once again been renamed the Berlin Philharmonic's director for life; he died only two years later on November 30, 1954. Celibidache would not assume Furtwängler's conductorship as he had since parted ways with the Orchestra management and many of the musicians. Instead, the morning after Furtwängler's death, Karajan discussed with Gerhart von Westerman, the Philharmonic's Intendant, the possibility of taking over the conductorship. Although Karajan had conducted the orchestra a total of four times, and Furtwängler and Karajan had not had the easiest of relationships, on his deathbed, Furtwängler acknowledged Karajan should be his successor. Karajan's selection was crucial as the Orchestra was only eight weeks away from embarking on a concert tour of America. The tour held special political significance as it was meant to be a show of gratitude toward the Americans for their efforts during the Berlin Blockade. According to Westerman, the conductor would have to be someone of whom New York's Columbia Artist Management would approve. Otherwise, the entire tour would be in jeopardy. He frantically wrote to Joachim Tiburtus, Berlin's Minister of Culture, that "*Columbia Artists Management expects us to appear with a German conductor at the helm,*" and also a director who

specialized in German classical and romantic music. Westerman did not even consider Celibidache, as a Romanian who felt a greater affinity with the French Impressionists, as a suitable replacement for Furtwängler. This was the turning point in Karajan's career. In an interview with Herbert Pendegast published in "The Saturday Review" in the autumn of 1963, Karajan noted that he first dreamed of one day heading the Berlin Philharmonic in 1923 when he was only 15 "long before the war, long before everything, and I have never changed my mind". This ideal began with Wilhelm Furtwängler: "He was the first conductor who divided the responsibility for the interpretation between himself and the orchestra. Under him the Berlin Philharmonic learned to make music in the way a string quartet does. Forcing the orchestra to take the initiative and to make its own decisions in changing from one episode to the next, however, was sometimes at the risk of imperfect ensemble." Karajan's dream became a success, when his first musical encounter with the Berlin Philharmonic occurred in 1938. In 1966 he declared, "I asked how many were still in the orchestra who were there in 1938. I was shocked. There were only three." Karajan agreed to tour with the orchestra in U.S. on the condition that he be named conductor for life. Upon obtaining such an agreement, which was eventually made in May 1955, Karajan led the Berlin Philharmonic on the tour in 1955 under the patronage of West German's Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, which proved enormously successful. The tour opened February 27 in Washington and 20 cities were visited on this six-week tour. Jewish organizations demonstrated against Karajan in front of the New York's Carnegie Hall with placards on March 1, 1955: "They helped Hitler murder millions". Karajan noted the protests with demonstrative disinterest. More than 750 members of the American Federation of Musicians had signed a petition to prevent Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra from playing in New York. Karajan returned the same year in October to U.S. conducting the Philharmonic Orchestra of London. The Executive Committee of the New York Philharmonic under Arthur Judson already discussed an engagement of Karajan for the season 1949-50. The orchestra's manager Bruno Zinato had concerns

and the board unanimously postponed an engagement of Karajan. Bruno Walter wrote in a letter in 1956 to Zirato "Let me add that, although the engagement of Karajan may involve some difficulties, I consider it a must of view of his exceptional talent, reputation and success." An agreement could eventually be reached for the 1958-59 season, and Karajan conducted the New York Philharmonic for two weeks in November 1958. In the 1960's Karajan and his Berlin Philharmonics planned a concert tour to Israel. But the Israelis were clear: The orchestra could come, Karajan could not. Only when he died in 1989 the way was paved. In 1990 the Berlin Philharmonics were in Israel for the first time. Karajan eventually resigned after 34 years as director of the Berlin Philharmonic in 1989 as his chronic back problems have made it difficult for him to walk to a podium, cited frail health as his reason for resigning. Karajan died of a heart attack at his home in Anif, in the Austrian Alps, on 16 July 1989, at the age of 81. An aide reported that he was stricken in the early afternoon and died before a rescue helicopter could fly him to a hospital. The *Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester des Großdeutschen Rundfunks*: From 1940 to 1945, Georg Ludwig Jochum (the brother of Eugen Jochum) was General Music Director in Linz and opera conductor at the local Stadttheater. He headed the *Städtisches Symphonieorchester*, which he reshaped in 1943 in Hitler's order to "*Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester of the Großdeutschen Rundfunks*", and with whom he made his debut in April 1944 with a concert on Hitler's birthday. No effort or expense was spared. Many leading guest conductors appeared with the orchestra such as Böhm, Knappertsbusch, Kabasta, Schuricht, Keilberth and the young Karajan. The repertoire ranged from Vivaldi to Bartok, but inevitably centered on a high-profile Bruckner cycle. The radio broadcast by Karajan conducting Bach's Art of Fugue was one of the few recordings of the Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester that survived World War II, sent by Jochum with 120 other tapes to the German Reichs-Rundfunk-Gesellschaft in Berlin in March 1945.

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