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HISTORIC
PERFORMANCES

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Karl Böhm

Hindemith Concerto for Woodwinds, Harp and Orchestra
Bruckner Symphony No. 7

Vienna Philharmonic



Paul Hindemith (1895–1963)
Concerto for Woodwinds, Harp and Orchestra

- I. Moderately Fast 8:01
- II. Grazioso 2:57
- III. Rondo. Rather Fast 4:34

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)
Symphony No. 7 in E major, WAB 107

- I. Allegro moderato 19:40
- II. Adagio. Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam 22:09
- III. Scherzo. Sehr schnell – Trio. Etwas langsamer 9:35
- IV. Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht schnell 11:12

Werner Tripp flute
Gerhard Turetschek oboe
Alfred Prinz clarinet
Ernst Pamperl bassoon
Hubert Jelinek harp

Vienna Philharmonic
Karl Böhm

recorded live at Lucerne Festival
(Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)

Previously unreleased





Naturalness and sense of form Karl Böhm in Lucerne

“When I conducted *Tristan and Isolde* in Munich in January 1981, by chance almost all the conductors of note were in town: Carlos Kleiber, Herbert von Karajan and Karl Böhm,” Leonard Bernstein wrote in his preface to Franz Endler’s Böhm monograph. Forty years later, the compilation of these names makes us sit up, since it signals the tectonic shift that has taken place in musical interpretation in the meantime. Whereas the enigmatic podium refusenik Carlos Kleiber has risen by virtue of his charisma to the narrow ranks of the century’s greatest conductors alongside Arturo Toscanini and Wilhelm Furtwängler, the spell of the former “miracle” Karajan seems to have been broken comprehensively, and Karl Böhm appears to be almost forgotten. Yet Böhm, who died in Salzburg on 14 August 1981 at the age of 86, was undoubtedly one of the great conductors of international standing during the three decades between 1950 and 1980. In his obituary in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, the music critic Hans Heinz Stuckenschmidt praised him as a composer’s servant whose “faithfulness to the work was internalised”.

Born on 28 August 1894 in Graz, Böhm came from a family of lawyers who worshipped Richard Wagner. After his early years in Graz (1917–1921) and in Munich (1921–1927), where Bruno Walter kindled his passion for Mozart, he was appointed general music director in Darmstadt in 1927, moved to Hamburg in 1931 and in 1934 to the Dresden Semperoper as successor to Fritz Busch, who had been banished by the Nazis. Finally, in 1943, he became director of the Vienna State Opera. After the end of the war, like Wilhelm Furtwängler and Herbert von Karajan, he received a performing ban from Allies for two years. Böhm was never a member of the Nazi party, but in a mixture of political naivety and sheer career opportunism he aligned himself with the Nazi rulers, for example by paying homage to Hitler at the annexation of Austria in 1938: “Anyone who does not approve of this act by our Führer with absolute affirmation does not deserve to bear the honorific title of German.” The Nazis thanked him by including him on their “divinely gifted” register in 1944, which exempted him from the war effort. Later, Böhm no longer wanted to remember this. For a short period, from 1954 to 1956, he again took up the directorship of the Vienna State Opera, opening the rebuilt opera house with Beethoven’s *Fidelio* on 5 November 1955. After his resignation, forced upon him by intrigues, he remained loyal to the State Opera and the Vienna Philharmonic, with whom he had been associated since 1933, but also made guest appearances as a conductor at all major musical centres across the world, including at the Salzburg Festival and also, from 1962, at the Bayreuth Wagner Festival.

Karl Böhm also appeared regularly at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern (as the Lucerne Festival was called until 1999) – for the first time on 20 August 1960, and for the final time on 4 September 1978. For nine of his eleven concerts he conducted the Vienna Philharmonic, and he gave one concert each with the Swiss Festival Orchestra (1960) and London’s Philharmonia Orchestra (1963). By this time Böhm was already regarded as the advocate of the great German symphonic composers from Mozart to Brahms. Only twice did he depart from this tradition in his Lucerne concert programmes: the first time, on 3 September 1973, when he conducted the *Petite symphonie concertante*, a work by the French Swiss composer Frank Martin; the second time, on 6 September 1970, when he conducted Paul Hindemith’s *Concerto for Woodwinds, Harp and Orchestra*.



In his youth, Böhm had also advocated contemporary music. In Darmstadt, Hamburg and Dresden, he repeatedly championed newer operas, especially Alban Berg's *Wozzeck* – and later on, after the Second World War, *Lulu* – helping to establish them internationally. Both Berg operas are among his best recordings and have withstood the test of time. He conducted Hindemith's opera, *Neues vom Tage*, in Darmstadt, a major work of the “New Objectivity” [Neue Sachlichkeit] movement, and he also gave the Viennese premiere of *Mathis der Maler* in 1958.

Hindemith's concerto in three movements had been commissioned by Columbia University in New York and was written in 1949. Its true purpose, however, was to celebrate Hindemith's own silver wedding anniversary, as can be easily guessed from the quotation of Mendelssohn's popular “Wedding March” from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the opening of the finale. Formally, the concerto is guided by the pre-classical *sinfonia concertante* of the Mannheim School and offers especially rewarding passages to the five-part *concertino* grouping. The three short movements are solidly crafted music of the kind that Hindemith wrote for a wide variety of chamber and orchestra formations after his youthful *Sturm und Drang* period: sporty and extrovert in the fast two outer movements, and with a collected sense of calm in the “*grazioso*” of the slow middle movement. The *concertino* is dominated by a floating harp; the solid brass section in the orchestra is not always convincing. In the fugal final movement, the clarinet makes itself heard at the beginning and then reappears several times with that unmistakable Mendelssohn quotation.

Browsing through the reviews published in Swiss daily newspapers at the time, it appears that the “weak and unimpressive” opening piece (according to Mario Gerteis in the *Luzerner Neueste Nachrichten*), which was followed by Mozart's Symphony in B flat major, K. 319, and, after the interval, by Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, was not particularly well received. Ten years after his death, Hindemith was obviously already considered a composer who had been overtaken by history. However, the critics were unanimous in their praise of the Vienna Philharmonic's soloists – Werner Tripp (flute), Gerhard Turetschek (oboe), Alfred Prinz (clarinet), Ernst Pamperl (bassoon) and Hubert Jelinek (harp): “They made every effort to preserve the joy of playing and not to abandon the emotional dimension.” (Gerteis) Today's listeners will form their own judgement of this anti-romantic, neoclassical piece, which perhaps has slightly fallen out of favour. The performance itself is convincing and remarkable, if only as a maverick in Böhm's discography.

The symphonies of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner and Brahms together with Strauss' Symphonic Poems were at the centre of Böhm's concert repertoire; Mahler was conspicuous by his absence. Böhm was the first, with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1969, to present a complete recording of all 46 Mozart symphonies. Among the operas, *Così fan tutte*, which he recorded three times, was his favourite. His Mozart interpretations, which alongside those of his colleague Josef Krips were considered the epitome of the Viennese Mozart style, shaped the Mozart image during the first decades after the Second World War.

The name of Bruckner, a source of prolonged controversy, comes as a surprise amongst Böhm's symphonic preferences. Until the middle of the twentieth century, Bruckner was the idol of a fanatical community who worshipped him as “God's musician”. Böhm, however, wrote in his autobiography that he “as a ‘Wagnerian’, had an intimate relationship with him from the outset,” for which he was occasionally rebuked by his musical mentor, Richard Strauss, who had been raised within the “new German” tradi-



tion, as a successor to Liszt: “I always like to come to a concert of yours, provided there is no Brahms, no Bruckner, no Respighi or anything like that on the programme. During sixty years of conducting, I have done these things ad nauseam” (letter of 4 September 1943). On another occasion, Strauss even speaks of the Dresdeners as an “audience trained in Bruckner boredom” (letter of 23 December 1940).

As early as his Darmstadt years and also later in Dresden, Böhm championed Bruckner, without at all placing him on a pedestal, neither on a Catholic-religious, nor on an Austrian-down-to-earth, nor even on an ethnic-Germanic one. He regularly programmed all the symphonies for his concert performances, although he did not record all of them; from the 1930s he always performed them in the original versions restored by Robert Haas, Alfred Orel and later Leopold Nowak. The Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, recorded in 1935/36 with the Sächsische Staatskapelle, are amongst Böhm’s very first recordings, and are unique documents of the early discographic Bruckner reception.

“Either you have a relationship with Bruckner, or you never do”, was Böhm’s equally enthusiastic and apodictic statement in his autobiography. Karl Böhm’s Bruckner interpretations possess an aura, but it is neither a priestly nor a histrionic one. He kept his distance from the pious, pathos-laden manner of Eugen Jochum, the mannered and magisterial style of Sergiu Celibidache or the austere, matter-of-fact interpretations of Michael Gielen and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. Here, too, he proves himself to be a musician of anti-pathos. “The eccentric, of whatever kind, and the border-crossing or even simply spectacular”, according to the music critic Gerhard R. Koch, “were not necessarily Böhm’s thing.” This is confirmed once again by Böhm’s interpretation of Bruckner’s most frequently performed symphony, the Seventh, which he conducted in Lucerne on 6 September 1964. On that occasion, it was preceded by Strauss’ *Four Last Songs*, sung by Lisa della Casa. For Willi Schuh, the critic of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, no praise was too high, as can be seen in the last sentence of his review of 8 September 1964: “On this memorable evening, Böhm revealed himself once again as the greatest, most genuine musician among the conductors of our time.”

Listening to the recording today, which has been carefully restored, but whose recording technology is now considered dated and overmodulated, especially in the scherzo, one can but agree with Schuh. Especially in Bruckner’s formally idiosyncratic symphonies, whose block-like static tectonics still challenge their interpreters, Böhm’s strict objectivity, balancing between the extremes of subjective internalisation and motoric intensity, proves its worth. From the warm sound of the first, lengthened cello entry in the opening movement, he stretches an arc that carries the listener from the appearance of the third theme, through the many abrupt changes – the “starts, congestions, interruptions, new beginnings, agglomerations and discharges” (Hans-Joachim Hinrichsen) so typical of Bruckner – to the solemn, hymn-like surge of the coda.

Böhm never loses sight of the whole, but plays out every articulatory detail as notated, with almost scrupulous textual fidelity, without elevating this structural clarity into a principle. And he follows Bruckner’s block-like editing technique without aggressively emphasising the collage-like modernism of these building blocks, which are usually set against each other without any transitions. As a result, he avoids the impression of creating sequences, or even additions. Böhm does not evade the solemn monumen-



tality, especially in the finale, but he does not exaggerate it into a sense of false, violent pathos; instead, he always remains aware of the diaphanous transparency of this, the brightest, most classicistic and, probably for these reasons, the most popular of Bruckner's symphonies. Tempo and phrasing, for all their agogic flexibility and subjective spontaneity, follow the natural flow and are filled with overflowing sense of *cantabile*, especially in what the composer himself called the "singing phrases" – the internalised second themes of his sonata movements. "The way in which everything here became breathing, blossoming life," Willi Schuh wrote in his review, "the way in which the flow of the performance transcended the regularity of the periods and was put at the service of the inner dynamic development, the way in which the differentiation of the articulation and the unfailingly moderate rubato and the expressive tempo modifications uncovered the innermost life forces, that was intoxicating, not through effective disposition, but through the perfect unity of intuitive and knowledgeable interpretation."

The heart of the work, as well as that of the performance, is the "Adagio", an extensive lament – indeed funeral music – in C sharp minor, which has been compared to the two most famous funeral marches of the nineteenth century: the slow movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony and the funeral march in Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Böhm clearly strived to realise the magic in this poignant music. Apart from the studio recording with the Vienna Philharmonic from 1976, there are at least seven recordings of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony made by him between 1943 and 1977. They differ in many details relating to interpretation and performance, including tempi, though not fundamentally – with the exception of the "Adagio", which is almost five minutes shorter in the Lucerne performance than in a Viennese concert recording made in 1948.

With the first use of four Wagner tubas, two tenor and two bass tubas, this funeral music is a homage to the Bayreuth master whom Bruckner revered and whose death he claimed to have foreseen. At the point when he receives the news of Wagner's death, Bruckner inserts an eight-bar interlude (at rehearsal letter X), immediately after the *fortissimo* eruption featuring the controversial cymbal crash included by Böhm – a grounded brass passage for the tubas and two horns, modelled on the chorale-like *Aequale* played at funerals in Bruckner's native Upper Austria. Böhm underlines this contrast between an ecstatically emphatic sound and bleakly consoling funeral music, between exuberant transcendence and a painful farewell to life, in all its harshness: overwhelming despite all sobriety, shocking despite all anti-pathos, as is so characteristic of his style of music-making.

In a speech given on 28 August 1979 in Salzburg on the occasion of the 85th birthday of his colleague and rival, Herbert von Karajan emphasised the self-evident and seemingly entirely natural quality of Böhm's music-making, using an apt comparison: "When Buddhist Zen masters perform archery, they do not say, 'I am shooting', but instead, 'There is shooting'. The action occurs as a matter of course, one doesn't really have to add anything to it. From this point of view, one can say about Karl Böhm: 'There is music-making.'"

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recording: live recording at Lucerne Festival (Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern)
Previously unreleased



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recording producer: Jürg Jecklin (1964) | Hans-Rudolf Fleischmann (1970)
executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

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