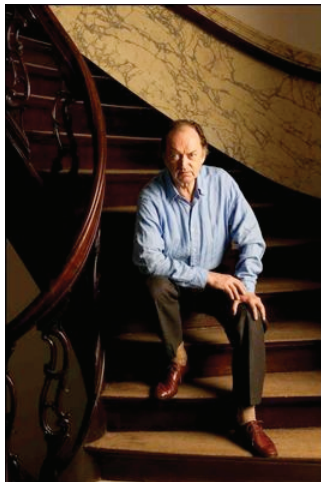


Perhaps no single musician has ever achieved such high accomplishment across such a broad span of repertory as Nikolaus Harnoncourt. His first professional job was as cellist for the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. Almost immediately, however, Harnoncourt sought to specialize in performing music of the past upon historically correct instruments; he was one of the first professional musicians to do so. Over the course of a stunningly influential career, Harnoncourt has gradually worked forward into more modern repertoires. His many awards include repeated top recording medals from at least six European countries, and a Gramophone Award for Special Achievement in 1990. His decades of recordings on the Teldec label fully encompass seven centuries of music history.

Harnoncourt considers his own life strongly influenced by an adolescence under the shadow of Nazism. He was born Nikolaus de la Fontaine und d'Harnoncourt in Berlin; his aristocratic family moved south to its ancestral mansion in Graz, Austria. After years of hardship under the Nazi regime, the Harnoncourt family fled to Salzburg in 1945. There he found his calling, and began studying the cello under Paul Grummer. No less a figure than Herbert von Karajan accepted Harnoncourt into the Vienna Symphony in 1952. However, his path was destined elsewhere. While in college, Harnoncourt became fascinated by the original Baroque instruments languishing in antique shops, and wondered why professional musicians didn't use these brilliant artifacts to produce the music of their time.

In 1953, Harnoncourt and his wife Alice founded the Concentus Musicus Wien, the first professional Baroque orchestra. They took players from the symphony, trained collaboratively for four years on early instruments, and exploded onto the European scene in 1957. Their first recording project was the Purcell Viol Fantasias, followed by a series of highly acclaimed recordings of the major works of Bach. In the 1970s, Harnoncourt and Gustav Leonhardt collaborated on a massive recording project of all Bach's cantatas. Meanwhile, Harnoncourt and Concentus Musicus romped through much of the Baroque literature, including Monteverdi's operas, Telemann, Rameau, and Fux. Later, he broadened his repertory to include Haydn and Mozart with Concentus Musicus, as well as masterworks from the nineteenth century operatic and symphonic repertory (including a million-selling cycle of Beethoven symphonies) with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Berlin Philharmonic, and the Concertgebouw Orchestra. He taught as professor of performance practice at the Salzburg Mozarteum (1972-1993), and has written three full-length books on the subject closest to his heart.



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

# Johann Sebastian Bach

## Brandenburg Concertos no 1-6

### Nikolaus Harnoncourt

#### Vienna Concentus Musicus

Leonhardt, Wenzinger and Harnoncourt were among the first musicians to attempt to put an understanding of Baroque ornamentation, fingerings and bowings, tempo, rhythm and performing forces into practice, as gleaned from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century treatises; in the 1950s, they were also releasing some of the first period instrument recordings of Bach's music.

"I know of few more engaging first movements of No. 3 and not one version of No. 6 which so lovingly draws the listener into the secret motivic associations of this most marvellous of consort pieces than the Harnoncourt rendition. . . "

Years ago, the Austrian conductor Felix Weingartner orchestrated Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata (an incredibly difficult piano work). A critic likened this exercise to getting to the summit of Everest by helicopter. I had similar thoughts when I listened to this 1964 recording of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos directed by Harnoncourt on original instruments and listening to Karajan's contemporaneous version of the same works with the incredibly slick Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. This recording was made in 1964, and I am sure must be the first to have been made on instruments made in Bach's day or copies of those instruments. At the time, there was no 'original instruments' industry, and the levels of execution were not as polished as later performances. The strings lack the bloom that the Berlin Philharmonic enjoys. The natural valve-less trumpets and horns do not have perfect

intonation and ease of production. However, I absolutely love these performances, warts and all. There is a kind of honesty and integrity in them that sleek Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic somehow lack. Nothing sounds 'manufactured' - I feel that Bach's vision is more readily communicated. For one thing, you get far more notes - inner detail and part writing is exposed, and the listener gets to register so much more music. Karajan, by comparison, tends to smother much of this detail. These Brandenburgs are not performed at a breakneck pace. There is a naturalness in all the tempi here, and I found little to question.

Harnoncourt's 1964 Telefunken release, which showcases Harnoncourt in his prime: bright sound, energetic playing (not just fast tempi), with the period instruments obviously an exhilarating discovery for both performers and listeners. Nikolaus Harnoncourt provides one of the great five-star performances of Bach's legendary Brandenburg Concertos. Despite having been recorded in 1964, the sound quality is fresh, crisp, with a remarkable sense of presence. The performances are spirited and authentically played on period instruments. These are performances I listened to years ago which made me fall in love with these delightful compositions when they were available as a very "aristocratic" commodity.

# Johann Sebastian Bach

## Brandenburg Concertos no 1-6

Nikolaus Harnoncourt  
Vienna Concentus Musicus

I. Concerto No. 1 22:35

II. Concerto No. 2 13:45

III. Concerto No. 3 11:40

IV. Concerto No. 4 16:35

V. Concerto No. 5 23:55

VI. Concerto No. 6 16:40

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Please Note: In the interest of preserving the superb sound quality of these historic recordings, they have been preserved in their original, pristine state for maximum fidelity. Transferred from commercially released, analog reel-to-reel tapes (some of which are more than 50 years old), the recordings themselves can be subject to certain "artifacts" which are an inseparable part of the original analog recording process, such as tape "hiss" or other defects, and these may be audible on certain music tracks. Because your CD or DVD-A was individually "burned" in order to realize superior sound quality to stamped, mass-produced versions, microscopic cosmetic blemishes may be visible. Please regard these tiny marks as evidence of the "human touch" in the care and individual attention that each and every HDTT disc receives during its very demanding manufacturing process.



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