

Herbert von Karajan was among the most famous conductors of all time -- a man whose talent and autocratic bearing lifted him to a position of unprecedented dominance in European musical circles. He was born on April 5, 1908 in Salzburg, Austria, to a cultured Austrian family of Greek descent (their original name was Karajannis). His musical training began at the Mozarteum Conservatory in Salzburg where he studied piano with Franz Ledwenke, theory with Franz Zauer, and composition with Bernhard Paumgartner, who encouraged Karajan to pursue conducting. Karajan graduated from the conservatory in 1926, and continued his studies at the Vienna Academy of Music and Performing Arts, where he studied piano with Josef Hofman and conducting with Alexander Wunderer and Franz Schalk. Karajan's conducting debut came on January 22, 1929, with the Mozarteum Orchestra in Salzburg. Consequently, the young maestro directed a performance of Strauss' Salome at the Salzburg Festspielhaus, and was named principal conductor of the Ulm Stadttheater, where he remained in that capacity until 1934.

The next fourteen years saw the young conductor's reputation grow rapidly. He was named music director of the Aachen Stadttheater (1934-1942), had his debut at the Vienna State Opera (1937), and accepted a position with the Deutsch Grammophon Gesellschaft (1938-1943). In 1939, Karajan was appointed conductor of the Berlin State Opera, and director of the Preussische Staatskapelle Symphony concerts. In 1948, he was appointed for life, to the position of director of the Chorale Society at the Society of the Friends of Music, in Vienna.

In 1948, Herbert von Karajan also served at the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Philharmonia Orchestra, and La Scala, before succeeding Wilhelm Furtwängler as the music director of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra -- a union that would cement his reputation as one of the world's premier conductors. In 1955, Karajan brought that orchestra to the United States on the first of many international tours. The decade that followed saw Karajan accept several appointments, including those to the Salzburg Festival and the Vienna State Opera. In 1967, Karajan had his Metropolitan Opera debut, conducting a performance of Wagner's Die Walküre, and the same year, founded the Salzburg Easter Festival. In 1968, the Herbert von Karajan Foundation was founded to support the research of "conscious musical perception."

Herbert von Karajan was awarded the "Ring of the Province of Salzburg," Golden Grammophone, Arts Prize (Lucerne), Grand Prix International du Disque, Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society, German Golden Disc Prize, UNESCO International Music Prize, Olympia Prize of the Onassis Foundation, and multiple Grammophone awards, among others. He was elected to an honorary senate seat at the University of Salzburg. The maestro was also recognized with honorary degrees from a host of universities.

Karajan, along with Akio Morita and Norio Ohga (president and vice-president respectively, of Japanese Sony Group), unveiled and presented the Compact Disc Digital Audio System in 1981. In 1982, Karajan founded Telemondial S.A.M. with Uli Markle, in an effort to document the maestro's illustrious legacy on videotape and laser disc, and to help broaden the scope of "musical expression," through the use of modern technology. In 1984, Karajan recorded the complete Beethoven symphonies with film adaptation, made possible by his own Telemondial. In 1988, Deutsch Grammophone released a collection of one hundred "masterworks" recordings made by the conductor. Herbert von Karajan's discography is impressive to say the least, and will certainly endure in musical arenas, as some of the most valued interpretations of the repertoire available. Herbert von Karajan, often referred to as "general music director of Europe," died in Salzburg of heart failure July 16, 1989.



Highlights • Bizet

CARMEN



Leontyne Price
Franco Corelli
Mirella Freni
Robert Merrill



Herbert von Karajan
Vienna Philharmonic

*Vienna State Opera Chorus
Vienna Boys Choir*



The reception history of Georges Bizet's final dramatic work, *Carmen*, is rife with ironies. Although almost unanimously condemned by Parisian critics after its first performances in 1875 for its overt sexuality and graphic final scene, *Carmen* intrigued a number of sophisticated minds and ultimately reached the public in a way that perhaps no other opera has. Bizet's aim in composing *Carmen* had been to transform the flaccid, moralistic bourgeois genre of *opéra comique* into a more sophisticated type of staged work. With a libretto by Ludovic Halévy and Henri Meilhac, *Carmen* survives in no single authoritative version despite its enormous popularity and influence. Guiraud converted the original sections of spoken dialogue into recitative for the 1875 Vienna performances. In recent years the original version has made a striking comeback, and one can argue that it is far more telling dramatically than the traditional version with the recitatives. There is also a popular orchestral suite drawn from the opera, and several violin and piano fantasies on its themes also exist. *Carmen* is cornerstone item in any opera collection. It is ironic that Bizet composed one of music's most evocative landscapes of Spain without ever having been there.

Bizet based his *opéra comique* on Prosper Mérimée's story, *Carmen*, which had appeared in October 1845. Librettists Halévy and Meilhac emphasized the exotic characters of Mérimée's story and retained the themes of social class distinctions, overt sexuality, and misogyny that emerge so forcefully in Mérimée's model. Bizet gave musical expression to the libretto using recurring motives, a distinctive melodic style, and manipulations of genre conventions to give each character a musical significance and a unique expressive idiom. The opera's prelude introduces some of the most important themes, including Escamillo's

toreador music and an exotic and sinewy chromatic motive that permeates the opera as a musical symbol for both *Carmen*'s character and the insurmountable power of fate. The gypsy fortune-teller *Carmen* sings in dance numbers, such as the habanera ("L'amour est un oiseau rebelle") and the seguidilla ("Près des ramparts de Seville") of Act One, and the Gypsy song ("Les tringles des sistres tintaient") of Act Two. Traversing boundaries of diatonic harmony, the sultry chromaticism of *Carmen*'s habanera theme underscores her status as both ethnic outsider and sexually adventuresome female. In this she stands in sharp contrast to Micaëla, whose Act Three aria ("Je sais que rien ne m'épouvante") is set in the ternary form of the elevated bel canto French grand opera aria. The bullfighter Escamillo announces his trade and masculine prowess in the rollicking Act Two toreador song ("Toréador, en garde!"), which carries the musical suggestion of battle in its fanfare opening and insistent march rhythm. Don José's musical styles reflect different levels in his descent from dutiful soldier to the underworld of obsession. In Act One, Don José sings in a duet with Micaëla ("Ma mère, je la vois"), adopting her elevated lyrical vocal style. In Act Two, after his imprisonment, Don José sings a more popular march-like tune ("Halte-là! Qui va là? Dragon d'Alcala"), reflecting his lower social status. His angst-ridden wailings in the opera's final scene defy clear formal arrangement and convey the psychological turmoil of an obsessed and defeated individual. Thus did Bizet forge a work that both summed up the musical resources available to him and had enough color and sheer melodic attractiveness to insinuate itself permanently into the public mind. *Carmen*, indeed, has been the subject of several popular-music adaptations over the years.

Bizet Carmen (Highlights)

Herbert von Karajan / Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

- 1 Habanera 5:51
 - 2 Seguidilla And Duet 4:55
 - 3 Gypsy Song 4:38
 - 4 Toreador Song 5:38
 - 5 Quintet 4:58
 - 6 Flower Song 3:58
 - 7 Card Scene 7:57
 - 8 Micaela's Aria 5:40
 - 9 Les voicil Les voicil 5:41
 - 10 C'est Toi! C'est Moi! (Duet) 11:15
- Total Time: 1:00:31

Recorded by Decca for RCA on November 1963 at Sofiensaal, Vienna
Producer: John Culshaw Engineers: Gordon Parry & Jack Law



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