

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 Gramophone, 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 Gramophone 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.

VON KARAJAN BRAHMS THIRD SYMPHONY TRAGIC OVERTURE



THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The time when performers and composers had personal mottoes -- Wieniawski's "Il faut risquer" (I must risk it), Joachim's "Frei aber einsam" (Free but lonely), Brahms' "Frei aber froh" (Free but happy) -- is long since past, but still such mottoes are more than just biographical curiosities: there are at least two very well-recognized musical encryptions of those mottoes. Schumann, Albert Dietrich, and Brahms put their collective talents together to compose the "F-A-E" Sonata as a gift for Joachim, and, when Brahms came up with his own motto, he decided to use the pitches of its initials -- F-A-F -- as the motto theme for his Symphony No. 3 in F, Op. 90.

Brahms composed the Symphony No. 3 in the summer of 1883 after a five year long sabbatical from symphonic work. It is often considered the other three symphonies' "poor sister" -- a prominent feature, yes, on any symphonic season calendar, but not quite the same stunning pinnacle of symphonic achievement that each of the other three is. How wrong that notion is!

If mass consumption has less taste for the Third Symphony's odd mix of overt heroism and dense formal logic than it has for the apparently more sensuous, even voluptuous, music of the second or fourth symphonies, or the Beethovenian spiritual journey of the First Symphony's outer movements, that is hardly evidence of a shortcoming on the composer's part. And indeed there is something heroic about the Symphony No. 3, enough to prompt Hans Richter, who conducted the premiere of the piece, to suggest that Brahms give it the subtitle "Eroica" (a suggestion that Brahms didn't take). It is a heroism utterly unlike the kind brought to mind by the composer of the actual

"Eroica" Symphony, however. How could a symphony that begins with a musical manifestation of the bittersweet words "free but happy" approach Beethoven's Third or Fifth in raw grittiness?

The symphony is in four movements: Allegro con brio, Andante, Poco allegretto, and Allegro. The winds open the first movement with a three-chord rendition of F-A-F (actually A flat), after which a tempestuous first theme, also outlining F-A-F, takes over. The second theme is as beautiful a melody, pulsating with warmth, as one might hope for.

The melody of the Andante is rather like that of the First Symphony's third movement, and not just because it is first given by a clarinet; it also has the same initial rhythm and the same gentle intervallic circle. Poco allegretto is hardly a scherzo; it is almost mournful.

The finale rekindles some of the first movement's dramatic fire. The quiet, unison theme of the opening is like the long-lost twin of the quiet, unison theme at the opening of the Second Symphony's finale, except that what is in the Second Symphony a joyous occasion is in the Third Symphony intense and shadowed. The F-A-F motto appears again in the final bars, this time winding downward towards the final serene F major chord by way of luxurious string tremolandos.

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BRAHMS THIRD SYMPHONY

TRAGIC OVERTURE

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1. Allegro Con Brio 9:45
 2. Adagio 8:17
 3. Allegretto Grazioso - Molto Vivace 5:55
 4. Allegro Ma Non Troppo 8:47
 5. Tragic Overture 14:00
- Total Time: 46:44

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