

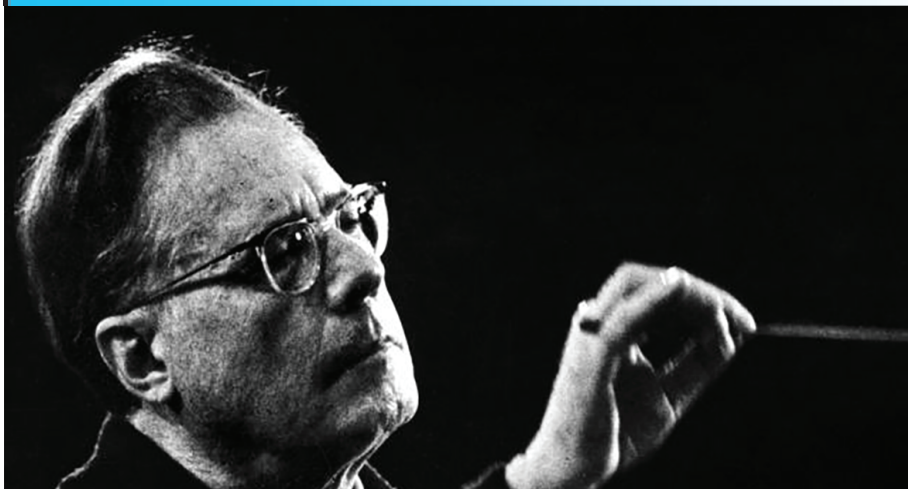
Schubert

Symphony No. 5 in B flat major

Mozart

Symphony No. 33 in B flat major

Karl Bohm - Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra



Karl Böhm was one of the greatest conductors of the twentieth century in the German tradition. He studied music as a child and continued to work and study in music while serving in the Austrian Army during World War I -- and while completing a doctorate in law. He coached singers at the Graz Opera and was permitted to conduct a performance of Nessler's *Der Trompeter von Sackingen*. He never had conducting lessons, but made close studies of the work of both Bruno Walter and Carl Muck.

In 1921 he was hired by the Bavarian State Opera in Munich, and then he became Generalmusikdirektor in both Darmstadt (1927) and Hamburg (1931-1933). He gained a reputation for his fine performances of Mozart, Wagner, and Richard Strauss, as well as his championing of modern German music, including operas by Krenek and Berg. Böhm debuted in Vienna in 1933, leading Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. In 1934 he became director of the Dresden State Opera, Richard Strauss's favorite theater. There, Böhm conducted premieres of Strauss's *Die schweigsame Frau* (1935) and *Dafne* (1938). He remained at the helm in Dresden through 1943, at which point he became director of the Vienna State Opera (1943-1945). Richard Strauss was not in official favor, and Joseph Goebbels banned any recognition of the great composer's 80th birthday in 1944. However, Böhm participated in a de facto observance, as a large number of Strauss's orchestral and operatic works "just happened" to be played about the time of the birthday.

After the war, Böhm was forbidden to perform until he underwent "de-Nazification," a procedure whereby prominent Austro-Germans were investigated for complicity in Nazi crimes. He was eventually cleared of any suspicion, and was permitted to resume work in 1947.

Böhm oversaw the German repertory at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (1950-1953), and again served as director of the Vienna State Opera (1954-1956). He debuted in the USA at New York's Metropolitan Opera with Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 1957, and took prominent German orchestras and opera companies on tour. The Vienna Philharmonic bestowed on him the title "Ehrendirigent," and he was proclaimed Generalmusikdirektor of Austria. He left a legacy of many great recordings, including a complete Wagner Ring cycle considered by many critics to be the best. While his Wagner and Strauss were sumptuously Romantic, his Mozart was scrupulously Classical in approach.

Schubert wrote the score of his Fifth symphony (D. 485) in September of 1816, completing it on October 3rd. Of Schubert's seven completed symphonies, this symphony, is the only one in a chamber setting, that is, without trumpets, timpani, or clarinets. Perhaps the smaller orchestration reflects the limited number of players available to Hatwig, but this explanation is not entirely satisfactory. Contrary to the popularized view of Franz Schubert, he was not a man to be influenced by such circumstances. Another view is that this symphony was meant to speak its musical message more directly than could a great 'public' symphony.

The symphony is in the key of B-flat minor and following an elegant and classical Allegro, a charming Andante seems to continue in the 18th century spirit. It opens as a straightforward song form, with a developing middle section in contrast to the outside statements. Schubert begins the return, but in a surprise move he then allows the listener a review of nearly the entire middle section, with its extended harmonic journey in search of the home key and theme. The straightforward but energetic and fast-paced Menuetto reminds us how far the character of this form had removed itself from its ancestor in the dance. Schubert symphony no. 5

In keeping with the rest of the work, the Allegro vivace is completely classical in form and character; it requires an especially light presto treatment for which the old-style instruments are admirably suited. In the fall of 1816, Franz Schubert heard the first performance of his Fifth Symphony at the establishment of Otto Hatwig in Vienna's Schottenhof. A year and a half later Hatwig also conducted the Sixth Symphony at these concerts. Hatwig was a violinist in the Burgtheater Orchestra, composer, pianoteacher and conductor whose concerts had grown out of modest string evenings at the home of Schubert's father. It is doubtful that any of these first performances captured much of the important creative spirit in Schubert's music.

The years 1779 to 1781 were immensely difficult for Mozart. In January 1779, he returned from an unsuccessful, sixteen-month tour whose purpose was to find him a more worthy position than the humiliating, unappreciative one that he occupied in Salzburg. The time he spent in Paris had been particularly distressing, professionally and personally. His mother's death in July 1778 marked the lowest point. He set out on that tour as a young, naïve man, and returned from it as a worldly-wise and determined adult.

Back in Salzburg and acutely aware that everyone knew of his failed attempt to improve his lot, he dug deep within his professional pride and created some outstanding music. Among the major compositions of the following two years were the Coronation Mass, K.317, two sets of Vespers for Salzburg Cathedral, and the spacious, gloriously entertaining Posthorn Serenade, K.320.

The previous two symphonies had been three-movement works, and he had specifically tailored No. 31 for the colour-loving, effects-happy audiences of Paris. In No. 33 he returned to a more traditional Austro-German style, one more concerned with form and substance than superficial glamour. It too originally had three movements. He added a minuet, probably in the mid-1780s. The reason was most likely a performance in Vienna, where four-movement symphonies were the norm.

No. 33 contains many passages of almost chamber-like intimacy, in contrast to the grand, public manner of the Paris Symphony in particular. The absence of trumpets in the orchestra increased that quality. It was one of his few symphonies to appear in print during his lifetime. The Vienna firm Artaria published it in 1785.

The first movement expertly yet amiably balances the gracious, the vital and the learned. In its light, lilting manner it almost resembles a waltz, a dance just then emerging from the ländler, an Austrian country dance. The brief second movement flows along warmly, the wind instruments only occasionally lending support to what is first and foremost a string-based texture. The added minuet is a well-mannered affair. Mozart tosses aside powdered, aristocratic manners in the vivacious and cheeky finale.

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Recorded 1966 by Deutsche Grammophon

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