

### **1.1. «Серйозна музика» та образ диригента на прикладі Карла Бема**

*Анотація.* Досліджується концепція «серйозної музики» та її еволюція в контексті історії культури, ідеологічних впливів та соціального дискурсу. Репрезентативна творча особистість Карла Бема інтерпретується з точки зору ролі диригента у формуванні музичного сприйняття музичних творів. Дослідження починається з вивчення історичної появи та диференціації «серйозної» та «розважальної» музики, зокрема, в культурі Європи XVIII і XIX століть, коли ці концепти змішувалися і перетиналися з поняттями, які відбивають соціальні структури та художні ідеології. «Серйозна музика» розглядається як концепт, народжений періодом Просвітництва й Романтизму, кульмінацією розвитку цього концепту стало його ототожнення з «релігією мистецтва», що прагнула вийти за межі соціально-політичних асоціацій через свої претензії на універсальність і мистецьку святість.

Роль диригента розглядається як символічне втілення влади, могутності та мистецької чистоти. Як приклад ставлення до функцій диригента розглядається діяльність Карла Бема, його професійна кар'єра. Інтерпретації творів Бетговена, Моцарта та інших композиторів, створені Бемом, обговорюються в контексті принципу вірності твору (*Werktreue*) та ідеологічних течій, які вплинули на музичну культуру в Європі XX століття. Розглядаються віхи кар'єри Бема, зокрема, його співпраця з Віденською філармонією та його виступи в «політично заряджені» періоди, які ілюструють напругу між мистецтвом і соціально-політичними ідеологіями. Крім того, аналіз поширюється на релігійні смислові

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відтінки музики як виду мистецтва. Висвітлюється питання німецько-австрійського домінування у сприйнятті класичної музики. Обговорюється феномен шанування таких композиторів, як Бетговен, який став квазі-міфічною фігурою мух культури. Кар'єра Бема служить лінзою для критики ширших культурних сил, які сформували піднесення диригента як центральної фігури в естетиці передачі музичної «правди». Завдяки дослідженню записів, практики виконання та історії сприйняття класичних творів, виявляється й підкреслюється незмінне значення історичного контексту і культурної ідеології у визначенні «серйозної музики» та її суспільних функцій. Зрештою, дослідження пропонує тонке розуміння того, як конструкти «серйозної музики» та роль диригента формували як музичну практику, так і культурну ідентичність, піднімаючи критичні питання про перетини традицій, сучасності та влади у світі класичної музики.

**Ключові слова.** «серйозна музика», диригент, інтерпретація, Карл Бем, культурна історія, ідеологічний вплив, суспільний дискурс, «художня релігія», традиція, сучасність.

Helmut LOOS

### 1.1. “Serious Music” and the Image of the Conductor as Exemplified by Karl Böhm<sup>1</sup>

*Abstract.* This paper investigates the concept of "serious music" and its evolution within the frameworks of cultural history, ideological influence, and societal discourse, using Karl Böhm as a representative figure of the conductor's role in shaping musical perception. The study begins by exploring the historical emergence and differentiation of "serious" and "entertainment" music, particularly

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<sup>1</sup> The article is taken from two publications: Helmut Loos, E-Musik — Kunstreligion der Moderne. Beethoven und andere Götter. Kassel, 2017. P. 7–10 and 10–27. — Ibid., Karl Böhm als Interpret Beethoven'scher Orchesterwerke. Selbstverständnis und Umsetzung. In: Karl Böhm: Biografie, Wirken, Rezeption, edited by Thomas Wozonig. Munich: edition text + kritik, 2024. P. 381–407.

in 18th- and 19th-century Europe, as these terms became intertwined with societal structures and artistic ideologies. "Serious music" is examined as a construct born of the Enlightenment and the Romantic period, culminating in its identification with an "art religion" that sought to transcend sociopolitical associations through its claims to universality and artistic sanctity.

The role of the conductor is scrutinized as a symbolic embodiment of power, authority, and artistic purity, with a focus on how Karl Böhm navigated these dimensions in his career. Böhm's interpretations of Beethoven, Mozart, and other composers are discussed in the context of fidelity to the work (*Werktreue*) and the ideological currents that influenced musical culture in 20th-century Europe. The paper examines Böhm's career milestones, including his association with the Vienna Philharmonic and his performances during politically charged periods, which illustrate the tension between art and sociopolitical ideologies.

Moreover, the analysis extends to the religious undertones of music as an art form, highlighting the German-Austrian dominance in classical music's reception and the veneration of composers like Beethoven as quasi-mythical figures. Böhm's career serves as a lens to critique the broader cultural forces that shaped the elevation of the conductor as a central figure in the transmission of musical "truth". Through an exploration of recordings, performance practices, and reception history, the paper underscores the enduring significance of historical context and cultural ideology in defining "serious music" and its societal functions.

Ultimately, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how the constructs of "serious music" and the role of the conductor have shaped both musical practice and cultural identity, raising critical questions about the intersections of tradition, modernity, and power in the world of classical music.

**Keywords:** "serious music", conductor, interpretation, Karl Böhm, cultural history, ideological influence, societal discourse, "art religion", tradition, modernity.

**Introduction.** *Analysis of the problem.* When societal conventions encapsulated in certain terms fall away, those terms sud-

denly become incomprehensible. "Serious music" is one such term, frequently prompting the question of how it should be distinguished from "entertainment music." During the era of "crossover" in Germany, when classical music and so-called lighter genres merged, especially on radio programs, the traditional concept of classical music as a designation for historical concert music — primarily of Viennese origin — began to dissolve. For instance, Hit Radio Antenne Sachsen advertised itself years ago as offering "the new fifty-fifty mix of classics and new hits," comparable to "The megahits of the '70s, '80s, AND the best of the latest!". Around the same time, reports surfaced worldwide about train stations and exclusive beaches broadcasting classical concert music to repel teenagers and the homeless.

In such contexts, the question often arises about what defines historical classical music and how it should be categorized — particularly as, under current German law, this distinction has significant financial implications for musicians, regulated by the GEMA (Society for Musical Performance and Mechanical Reproduction Rights). Such matters require coherent justification in societal discourse. In legal disputes, musicologists are often called upon as expert witnesses to substantiate rulings or, at times, provide definitive proof. However, the latter is impossible, despite the efforts of scholars dedicated to the art to resolve such questions conclusively.

The role of historical — i.e., critical — musicology can only be to document the origins and usage of such terms, describe their artistic and social conditions, and uncover their contexts and implications. This approach can create an objective, neutral foundation for informed decisions about contemporary issues, free from manipulation by pseudoscientific ideologies.

It is evident that such an endeavor must consider extensive temporal and cultural contexts. Additionally, the classification into "serious" and "light" music represents a crude categorization, leaving no room for finer distinctions. Thus, any attempt to describe these categories must rely on broad, simplifying directions, even though these could be extensively nuanced and specified upon closer examination. While musicology has a rich tradition of detailed studies — such as individual work monographs or examina-

tions of specific periods — this focus on narrow slices of music history often neglects the broader cultural contexts in which these works were embedded. Over time, musicology has concentrated on limited segments of musical life, to the extent that it sometimes loses sight of broader realities, occasionally leading to accusations of detachment from reality.

Yet, even efforts to encompass the entire breadth of music history and outline its fundamental directions are equally fraught. Here, the historian finds themselves in a position akin to that of a cartographer, who must create both a world map and a detailed city plan. However, unlike the cartographer — who recognizes the distinct value of these perspectives — musicology has long been dominated by questions of value judgments. Understanding where these value judgments originated and how they came to dominate is a question central to the issues discussed here.

*Purpose and objectives of the study.* The purpose and objectives of this work are to determine the concept of "serious music" and its evolution within the frameworks of cultural history, ideological influence, and societal discourse, using Karl Böhm as a representative figure of the conductor's role in shaping musical perception.

*Research methodology.* The study is based on the methods of a philosophical and historical approach to the phenomenon of musical culture, in particular to the art of musical interpretation and conducting a symphony orchestra.

## **Presentation of the main material**

**Simplified Dichotomies and Categorization in Art.** Simplified dichotomies and broad categorization are not uncommon in art. Musicians often express the categorical judgment that there is only "good" and "bad" music. This concept extends even into the realm of music philosophy, where composers and their works are classified as "progressive" or "regressive," as exemplified by Theodor W. Adorno's comparison of Arnold Schoenberg and Igor Stravinsky. Similar pairs of opposites can be found in Schumann and Liszt, Wagner and Mendelssohn, Brahms and Bruckner, Mussorgsky and

Tchaikovsky (innovators and westernizers), Scriabin and Rachmaninov, Smetana and Dvořák, Bartók and Kodály.

In many cases, it is unclear whether these oppositional attributions reflect the composers' personal positions or whether they are phenomena of how their work was received. Even with painstaking efforts to examine a composer's personality, it is impossible to directly infer their religiosity or worldview from their compositions, as musical works are always created within a societal framework, tailored to its specific circumstances and demands. This holds true even during the height of the Romantic cult of the artist in the 19th century, as seen in the example of Johannes Brahms and his *German Requiem*.

Historical interpretation is often overshadowed by the ideological or political agendas of those who appropriate a work, and the assignment of individual composers to specific cultural or political currents often shapes the aesthetic judgment of their music. Terms like "good," "bad," "progressive," or "regressive" already carry connotations that extend far beyond music itself.

**Cultural-Historical Perspectives on Music.** For a long time, cultural-historical perspectives on music were hindered — even obstructed — by the paradigm of "absolute music," which served as a coping mechanism after World War II.

At the same time, the deeply religious character of "serious music," as established in the Romantic conception of music, was misinterpreted as a purely secular art form. Even as the concept of music as an "art religion" has been discussed in recent years, a comprehensive approach to understanding its content and social context is still lacking.

This framework is tied to modernity, particularly to the Enlightenment and the rise of bourgeois society. Within this context, the terminology of "sacred music" and its relationship to "serious music" must first be clarified in order to understand the broader discourse about music.

Jürg Stenzl, in his article for the *Handbook of Musical Terminology*, demonstrates that terms like *Musica sacra* and "sacred music" did not originate in antiquity or the Middle Ages. Rather, apart from a few related formations, they only entered common usage in the

18th century<sup>1</sup>. An insightful formulation appears in 1816 in the *Constitution of the Sing-Akademie*, under §1: "The Sing-Akademie is an artistic society for sacred and serious music, especially for music in the strict style"<sup>2</sup>.

At this time, the adjectives "serious" and "sacred" were still used interchangeably. Over time, however, they became more distinct in common usage, with terminology for sacred music being differentiated according to social groups. Protestant church music came to be referred to as "sacred music"<sup>3</sup>, Catholic church music as *Musica sacra*<sup>4</sup>, and concert music, in the sense of an art religion of the national-liberal bourgeoisie, as "serious music."

By the 20th century, "serious music" had established itself as a kind of "art religion". It claimed to be "absolute" and part of an ideal alternative world, successfully eluding sociopolitical associations for a long time. This direction was significantly influenced by newly founded musicology departments at German universities, which sought to provide rational evidence for the historical necessity of "serious music" while aligning perfectly with prevailing ideas of progress and evolution.

This musicological alignment also contributed to the de-Christianisation of German society<sup>5</sup>, as theorists of modern secularization marginalized church music within history<sup>6</sup>. The composer, ele-

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<sup>1</sup> Stenzl, Jürg. *Musica sacra / Heilige Musik*. In: *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie*, ed. by Hans-Heinrich Eggebrecht and Abrecht Riethmüller. Stuttgart, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted from Gottfried Eberle, *200 Jahre Sing-Akademie zu Berlin. 'Ein Kunstverein für die Heilige Musik'*. Berlin, 1991. P. 71.

<sup>3</sup> Winterfeld, Carl von. *Zur Geschichte heiliger Tonkunst*. A series of individual essays. Leipzig, 1850.

<sup>4</sup> *Musica sacra*. Monthly journal for church music and liturgy. Regensburg since 1868.

<sup>5</sup> Loos, Helmut. *German Music and Musicology between Religion and Modernity. On the segregation of church music from history*. In: *Conference Report Krakow, 2024 (in preparation)*.

<sup>6</sup> Loos, Helmut. *Der Komponist als Gott musikalischer Kunstreligion. Die Sakralisierung der Tonkunst*. In: *Musik im Raum der Kirche. Fragen und*

vated to the status of a god in the religion of art, found his earthly representative in the conductor.

**The Conductor as a Symbol of Power.** Elias Canetti sharply analyzed this dynamic in his 1960 philosophical work, *Crowds and Power*<sup>1</sup>. Twice in his book, he uses the concert of "serious music" as an example to illustrate societal power structures. For Canetti, the orchestra represents a "mass crystal" — a small, rigid group designed to mobilize larger crowds. Individual musicians disappear within the orchestra's structure; despite their distinct functions, they appear only as part of the collective.

Toward the end of his treatise, Canetti provides a characterization of the conductor, asserting that there is no clearer expression of the nature of power than the conductor's role. While music is ostensibly the focus, and it is taken for granted that people attend concerts to hear symphonies, Canetti argues that the conductor mediates this experience, wielding absolute power over the voices. The diversity of instruments mirrors the diversity of humanity, and the conductor's authority transforms them into a unified entity, visible to all.

The entire concert ritual is centered on the conductor, who is viewed by the audience as a leader. Over his "small army of professional players," the conductor exercises absolute command, possessing the full score and thus omnipresence. The conductor presents the entire work, simultaneously and sequentially, creating a world that exists solely for the duration of the performance. During this time, the conductor is the ruler of this world<sup>2</sup>.

Canetti wrote his analysis during the height of the conductor cult, a period that saw the prominence of Karl Böhm and many of

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Perspektiven. Ein ökumenisches Handbuch zur Kirchenmusik, edited by Winfried Böning et al. Stuttgart and Ostfildern, 2007. P. 98–138.

<sup>1</sup> Canetti, Elias. *Masse und Macht*. Frankfurt a. M., 1960. P. 79f. In contrast to Canetti's objective description, the analysis by Theodor W. Adorno, *Dirigent und Orchester. Sozialpsychologische Aspekte*. In: Adorno, *Einleitung in die Musiksoziologie. Zwölf theoretische Vorlesungen*. Frankfurt a. M. (Suhrkamp) 1962/1973. P. 128–143, is characterised entirely by his personal philosophy of music.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. P. 442–444.



his contemporaries. Böhm himself referred to an important early text from the beginnings of modern conducting:

*"The study of Wagner's essay [On Conducting] ought to be a matter of course for every conductor"*<sup>1</sup>.

Richard Wagner regarded Ludwig van Beethoven as the ideal composer to embody his new approach to conducting. Wagner demanded more than technical skill from the conductor — he called for total commitment and energy, from meticulous score study that grasped melody and tempo to intensive rehearsal work culminating in a distinct interpretative vision. This interpretation was to be realized by the conductor, who commanded the orchestra like a virtuoso commands their instrument<sup>2</sup>.

This philosophy paved the way for the rise of the all-powerful star conductor, as Canetti describes. In Leipzig, this transition occurred with the rise of Arthur Nikisch to the position of Gewandhauskapellmeister in 1895, succeeding Carl Reinecke, who had approached the role more like a municipal music director, similar to Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, with a focus on enhancing the city's overall musical life. Increasingly, society was captivated by the specialist solely focused on the orchestra, a fascination expressed in a review of one of Benjamin Bilse's celebrated concerts in Leipzig's Central-Halle in 1881:

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Böhm, quoted in Chris Walton, *Inside Out: Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the 'Wagnerian' Conducting Tradition*. In: *Rund um Beethoven. Interpretationsforschung heute*, edited by Thomas Gartmann and Daniel Allenbach, Schliengen/Markgräflerland (Edition Argus), 2019. P. 218.

<sup>2</sup> Gutknecht, Dieter. *Richard Wagner: "Über das [mein] Dirigieren" (1869) — Vom Einsteiger zum interpretierenden Dirigenten. Wagner Lesarten. Beitrag zum Symposium Wagner-Lesarten — Richard Wagners "Der Ring des Nibelungen" im Blickfeld der, historischen Aufführungspraxis' am 29. September 2017 in der Universität zu Köln*, edited by Kai Hinrich Müller. Cologne (Wagner-Lesarten c/o Freunde von Concerto Köln e. V.). 2018.

*"Bilse has his players, so to speak, on a string, directing them like marionettes according to his will — here and there. In short, he is the absolute ruler in his realm, and that is how it must be".*

This societal ideal of the genius leader, seen as the pinnacle of evolutionary progress and the singular guide for humanity, had emerged during the Enlightenment and intensified under the lens of cultural Darwinism. The conductor embodied this ideal perfectly. Far from being contradictory, the conductor's self-perception as a servant aligned with the rise of "serious music" as the art religion of modernity, distinct from entertainment music. This development was epitomized by the Romantic image of Beethoven as the figurehead<sup>2</sup>.

The classical composer, creator of "immortal works" with timeless value, was elevated to the status of a god in modern society<sup>3</sup>. The conductor, in turn, became the god's representative on Earth and the proclaimer of eternal values. This belief underlies Karl Böhm's simple yet profound remark when introducing an orchestral rehearsal: *"I am thrilled to perform with you a piece whose original score I held in my hands with sacred reverence just eight days ago"*<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Vogel, M. Concert B. Bilse. Leipzig, 7th May. In: Leipziger Tageblatt, 8th May 1881.

<sup>2</sup> Loos, Helmut. E-Musik — Kunstreligion der Moderne. Beethoven und andere Götter. Kassel 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Loos, Helmut. Beethoven — The Zeus of Modernity. In: The Culturology Ideas. Research Work's Collection, National Academy of Arts of Ukraine. Institut for Cultural Research 18 (2020). P. 67–84.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Böhm and the Wiener Symphoniker. Probe/Schubert Sinfonie 9. At the rehearsal. (01/08/2022) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbVw-00rO8eU>: 'I am delighted to be able to welcome you here, especially to be able to perform Schubert's great C major with you, the score of which I held in my hands with holy reverence eight days ago, the original.' — Opening of the Bregenz Festival on 18 July 2018. Puppeteer Nikolaus Habjan with the 'Dr Karl Böhm Puppet': 'I am very happy to be able to greet you here today, and especially to be able to perform Beethoven's 5th symphony with you today, the score of which I held in my hands eight days ago, in holy awe, the original, that is.'

The physical connection to the autograph was regarded as a direct link to the realm of the absolute, legitimizing the conductor's role as the medium through which pure truth was conveyed in humble service.

**Karl Böhm and the Religion of Serious Music.** Karl Böhm did not offer extensive reflections on his self-perception as a conductor, but seemingly trivial remarks reveal that he had naturally grown into the tradition of the "religion of serious music" (serious, not joyous<sup>1</sup>). This is further evidenced by his effusive admiration for Mozart, whom he placed even above Beethoven. Böhm is credited with the following statement:

*"When I meet Beethoven in heaven, I will bow deeply and walk past him. When Mozart appears, I will fall to my knees and be unable to speak"*<sup>2</sup>.

It is widely acknowledged that Beethoven interpretations were not among Böhm's major achievements as a conductor. Instead, he is considered a specialist in Mozart and Strauss, as well as Wagner and Bruckner<sup>3</sup>; Beethoven is rarely mentioned in this context. However, biographically speaking, Beethoven — particularly his opera *Fidelio* — marked significant milestones in Böhm's career.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=475Ga-zeDeg&t=1607s> "Ich erinnere mich". Dr. Karl Böhm — Sein Leben, seine Musik. A film by Horant H. Hohlfeld. Germany, 1994, 11:45: 'Schubert once said to a friend: Do you actually know any cheerful music? I don't know any... Mozart is deeply sad in all his art... For me, there is always a deep seriousness in the background.'

<sup>2</sup> August Everding, "Das lebendige Metronom von Mozarts Herz". In: Franz Endler, Karl Böhm. Ein Dirigentenleben. Hamburg (Hoffmann und Campe), 1981. P. 250. See also <https://www.zitate.eu/autor/dr-karl-boehm-zitate>.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Leonard Bernstein, Vorwort. In: Franz Endler, Karl Böhm. Ein Dirigentenleben, Vorwort von Leonard Bernstein. Hamburg (Hoffmann und Campe), 1981. P. 9. — Erik Werba, Karl Böhm. In: Österreichische Musikzeitschrift 36 (1981), p. 497. <https://doi.org/10.7767/omz.1981.36.9.-497a>. — Karl Heinrich Ruppel, Der große Zuständige. Karl Böhm zum achtzigsten Geburtstag. In: Zweimonatsschrift für alle Gebiete des Musiklebens, 28 (1974). P. 366–368.

As a child, Böhm attended his first opera performance, *Fidelio*, with his mother at the Theater am Franzensplatz in Graz<sup>1</sup>, and it was the first score he ever owned. In 1920, the 150th anniversary of Beethoven's birth<sup>2</sup>, Böhm achieved his first major success with a celebrated anniversary performance of *Fidelio*. After World War II and a two-year conducting ban due to political entanglements, Böhm conducted *Fidelio* on June 7, 1947, at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, which served as a temporary venue for the destroyed Vienna State Opera<sup>3</sup>. Böhm noted<sup>4</sup> that he felt a deep connection with Florestan's fate and imprisonment:

*"As blasphemous as it may sound today, I felt intimately connected to Florestan's fate and his imprisonment"*<sup>5</sup>.

The grand reopening of the rebuilt Vienna State Opera on November 5, 1955, featured a state ceremony and *Fidelio* under Böhm's direction. recorded in his notebook: *"The success was extraordinary"*<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fidelio* was his mother's favourite opera, as Böhm recalled at a performance on 1 June 1953, the first anniversary of her death. Karl Böhm, notebooks [NB]. Paris-Lodron-Universität Salzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Uni-park, Karl Böhm Collection, here NB\_23-Mai-50\_30-Aug-56, no. 3093.

<sup>2</sup> Böhm, Karl. Ich erinnere mich ganz genau. Autobiographie, edited by Hans Weigel. Munich (Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl.), 1974. P. 33.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. P. 34f.

<sup>4</sup> NB\_28-Jan-46\_28-Apr-50. 1615.) Vienna State Opera (Theater an der Wien) 7th/VI. 'Fidelio'.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. P. 128.

<sup>6</sup> NB\_23-May-50\_30-Aug-56: Season 1955/56 'Director of the State Opera'!! 5 November [1955] Re-opening of the Vienna State Opera on the Ring at 11 o'clock in the morning. Solemn state ceremony in the presence of the entire federal government, the federal president and all ambassadors. 150 directors, 300 press people etc. [...] 3313.) 5th/XI. Opening performance of 'Fidelio' 150 million listened on the radio; the performance was also broadcast on television and, moreover, through loudspeakers in the Ring. It was a social event the likes of which not even the coronation in England could offer. The American Secretary of State, Dulles, came from Geneva, Henry Ford, B. Walter and all the great and the good were there; toilets, jewellery en masse. The performance was musically magnificent without Horn Gikser and gloriously magnificent. The high point was the 3rd Leonore. Mödl (Fid.) was magnificent as the character, with a searing high note.

However, on March 1, 1956, another *Fidelio* performance turned into a scandal, leading to protests against Böhm<sup>1</sup> and, ultimately, his resignation as director of the Vienna State Opera. Nevertheless, in his autobiography (1967) Böhm describes *Fidelio* as “the most beautiful of all operas” and attests to its high moral value, as it “expands into an oratorio of humanity at the end”<sup>2</sup>.

In the notebooks his wife Thea gave him, inscribed with a loving dedication, Böhm recorded his concert programs and occasionally commented on them. Eight notebooks have been preserved, documenting his activities in Darmstadt (Sept. 1928 — June 1931), Hamburg (Aug. 1931 — Dec. 1933), Dresden (Jan. 1934 — Dec. 1942), Vienna (Jan. 1943 — Feb. 1945), and in exile in Graz during his conducting ban (Sept. 1945 — April 1946 and April 1947 — Aug. 1954). He then returned to Vienna (Sept. 1954 — Aug. 1956) and documented the Beethoven anniversary season of 1970/71 (Sept. 1970 — Oct. 1971). Between 1928 and 1942, Beethoven and Mozart accounted for over 20% of his repertoire, with Mozart initially slightly surpassing Beethoven. Toward the end of this period, their combined share increased to 30%. During the late war years (1943–1945), performances of Beethoven and Mozart works reached 46%, with Beethoven surpassing Mozart. After the collapse of the Nazi regime, Mozart was absent from Böhm’s concerts until his first post-war performance in Vienna’s Great Hall of the Konzerthaus du-

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Dermota (Florestan) is the best there is today. Weber (Rocco), Schöffler (Pizarro) Seefried (Marz.) Kmentt (Jaqu.) The stage sets were conventional. The production was very weak, except for the prison choir! The success was magnificent despite the audience, which is so spoiled. I have gone down in history, so at least something of me will remain. I do not need to describe here the sacrifices that this and the entire opera festival cost; I will not forget them for the rest of my life.

<sup>1</sup> NB\_23-May-50\_30-Aug-56: Season 1955/56 ‘Staatsoperndirektor’!! 3350.) 1st of March, Vienna ‘Fidelio’. The darkest day of my musical life: I was met with wild catcalls and whistling, ‘punishing’ me for my holiday! Everything else is so indelibly engraved on me that I don’t need to entrust it to this book. People will still be very ashamed. Only the Philharmonic Orchestra stood by me 100 per cent.

<sup>2</sup> Böhm, Autobiographie. P. 128.

ring the first international music festival (June 16–30, 1947) with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra.

That Böhm resumed a pre-war concert series associated with National Socialist ideology in the Konzerthaus without resistance speaks volumes. Beethoven, during this time, was seen as the quintessential representative of indestructible German music. Forced to leave Vienna due to political attacks, Böhm returned to Graz, where he conducted three concerts in 1945 in the Stefaniensaal, featuring three Beethoven works:<sup>1</sup> the *Egmont Overture*, *Coriolan Overture*, and the Ninth Symphony. After his enforced conducting hiatus, Böhm resumed his concerts on April 21, 1947, with Beethoven's *Leonore Overture No. 3* and, on May 8, 1947, with the *Egmont Overture*. Böhm commented on this concert in his notebook under entry No. 2613 as follows:

*"Festive concert on the occasion of the "Day of Liberation," organized by all four Allied powers and the provincial government.*

*I. Egmont Overture*

*II. Milhaud: Serenade*

*III. Randall Thompson: Symphony No. 2*

*IV. Arnold Bax: Tintagel*

*V. Prokofiev: Russian Overture*

*In just four rehearsals, I managed to brilliantly deliver this very challenging program. The orchestra surpassed itself, and the most astonishing thing: the audience was incredibly enthusiastic".*

Böhm deliberately placed Beethoven's declaration of freedom ahead of works by composers from the four victorious powers: Darius Milhaud, Randall Thompson, Arnold Bax, and Sergei Prokofiev. The quotation marks around "Day of Liberation" speak volumes. On June 7, 1947, Böhm conducted the Vienna State Opera for the first time again, performing *Fidelio* in its temporary venue, the Theater an der Wien. In his notebook (entry No. 2615), Böhm commented on the performance:

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<sup>1</sup> See Karl, Böhm, letter of 15 December 1945 to Richard Strauss. In: Richard Strauss Karl Böhm Briefwechsel, edited and with commentary by Martina Steiger. Mainz et al. (Schott), 1999. P. 188.

*"There is no need to write down the story leading up to this performance (despite the prohibition by an occupying power), as I will never forget it. Describing the emotions I felt upon stepping onto the substitute podium is utterly impossible. I will never forget them, nor the icy demeanor of the Philharmonic musicians or the immense warmth of the choir.*

*The triumph of the evening was unparalleled, and the audience was simply touching. I conducted the entire evening as if in a trance; people said it was magnificent!"*

In this sense, *Fidelio* served as the opening piece for the reconstructed Vienna State Opera on November 5, 1955, embodying this defiant will to assert cultural continuity. The controversy surrounding the *Fidelio* performance on March 1, 1956, undoubtedly had more complex causes than merely the alleged neglect of the Vienna State Opera by Böhm as its director.

**Recordings and Interpretations of Beethoven's Works.** Beethoven's works, as interpreted by various conductors, allow for comparison through their recorded performances. Similar to posthumous evaluations of his career, Karl Böhm is not ranked among the preeminent interpreters of Beethoven within the realm of recordings.

His complete cycle of Beethoven's symphonies is not considered a definitive or reference recording<sup>1</sup>. In the "Legendary Conduc-

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<sup>1</sup> <https://referenzaufnahme.de/referenzaufnahme-beethoven-sinfonien> 01.09.2011 Beethoven symphonies: 1: Karajan (196 1/62), 2: Bernstein (1977–79), 3: Norrington (2003–4), 4: Furtwängler, 5: Kleiber, 6: Wand. — <https://www.tamino-klassikforum.at/index.php?thread/18468-welche-drei-gesamtaufnahmen-der-beethoven-symphonien-w%C3%BCrdet-ihr-ausw%C3%A4hlen-wenn-n/> 29 September 2015: 1. Leonard Bernstein, Vienna Philharmonic, 1977–1979, 2. Järvi Paavo. Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie. Bremen, 2006–2009. Here is a rare supporter of Böhm's recording: 'About ten years later [after Karajan 1961–1962] Karl Böhm recorded the cycle with the Vienna Philharmonic — a kind of counterpart to the Karajan recording.

The sound is even more rounded and full, the tempi well balanced. Since Böhm is my favourite conductor — and the Vienna Philharmonic is not only my 'house orchestra' but also one of the best orchestras in the world

tors" series by Orfeo International Music GmbH, Böhm is represented with works by Schubert and Richard Strauss, but not Beethoven<sup>1</sup>. The only exception is found in the "The Originals" series<sup>2</sup>, which includes Böhm's recording of Beethoven's 6th Symphony, notably paired with Schubert's 5th Symphony<sup>3</sup>.

Böhm consistently identified as both a native of Graz and an Austrian, which he used to explain his special relationship with the Vienna Philharmonic, a relationship that — according to the racial ideologies of the time — was also attributed to a supposed shared "bloodline"<sup>4</sup>.

An overview of the durations of different performances offers a message of its own, demonstrating how closely interpretations often align with one another. The principle of fidelity to the work (*Werktreue*), which reached its peak significance in the mid-20th century, represents a historical anomaly in music history. This principle is closely tied to the concept of "serious music" and all its connotations. Leonard Bernstein described this relatively narrow field of music as "exact music," sharply distinguishing it from all other genres<sup>5</sup>.

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— I couldn't make any other choice. Personally, I even prefer this recording to the one under Karajan.'

<sup>1</sup> Legendary conductors, Orfeo International Music GmbH, [2020], © 2020.

<sup>2</sup> The Originals — Legendäre Einspielungen von Decca, Philips und der Deutschen Grammophon. Series at jpc-Schallplatten-Versandhandelsgesellschaft mbH.

<sup>3</sup> Beethoven. Symphony № 6, 'Pastorale'. Schubert. Symphony № 5. Wiener Philharmoniker. Karl Böhm, DGG 44743–2.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FA39tl-PzQ0&t=2188s> Karl Böhm Portrait 40: 'The Vienna Philharmonic is not an orchestra that is easy to handle. But when you really connect with them, they can truly rise above themselves at decisive moments. And why? This orchestra is very homogeneous, almost all of them are Viennese, which means they speak the same language. They not only speak the same language on the outside, but also on the inside. They feel the same way and interpret the music that way.'

<sup>5</sup> <https://leonardbernstein.com/lectures/television-scripts/young-peoples-concerts/what-is-classical-music> Young People's Concert, What is Classical



This distinction not only applies to oral traditions and contemporary performance practices but also to notated music up to the 19th century. Early forms of musical notation, such as neumes, served as memory aids and templates for performances that allowed for significant freedom in ornamentation and variation. The field of historically informed performance (*Historische Aufführungspraxis*) engages deeply with this topic.

The idea that a piece of music must always be performed identically is foreign to traditions such as jazz, where each performance is unique. This original joy of music-making can still be glimpsed in figures like Franz Liszt, who adhered to the score during sight-reading but often took improvisational liberties in subsequent performances. Advocates of *Werktreue* criticized Liszt for such practices, accusing him of self-indulgence<sup>1</sup>. The rigid demand for *Werktreue* thus reflects the religious dimension of music as an art, treating the composer's written score as a sacred text to be conveyed unchanged and "untouched."

**The Religion of Music as a German Phenomenon.** This religious conception of music is a distinctly German phenomenon, and its widespread influence has been interpreted as "world domination" or the "hegemony of German music," revealing the spirit of the world. In this context, German music also encompassed Austrian music, which explains the successful collaboration between Wilhelm Backhaus and Böhm in their interpretations of Beethoven's piano concertos. Böhm had already recorded Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto with the Ukrainian pianist Lubka Kolessa for DECCA in 1939<sup>2</sup> — a recording he commented on in his notebooks<sup>3</sup>. From

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Music? Written by Leonard Bernstein, Original CBS Television Network Broadcast Date: 24 January, 1959.

<sup>1</sup> Axel Schröter, 'Der Name Beethoven ist heilig in der Kunst'. Studien zu Liszts Beethoven-Rezeption, Sinzig (Studio) 1999.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eEtrjMhCLQY> Lubka Kolessa plays Beethoven Piano Concerto No.3 (1939 Electrola). Lubka Kolessa's June 1, 1939 Electrola recording of Beethoven's Piano Concerto № 3 with Karl Böhm conducting the Sächsische Staatskapelle.

<sup>3</sup> '30. u. 31/V. [1939] Aufnahme für Elektrola Beethoven: e-moll Klavierkonzert (Lubka Kolessa)'

1934/35 onwards, Backhaus became his preferred partner for many years, a relationship based on mutual agreement and resulting friendship<sup>1</sup>.

Backhaus, a graduate of the Leipzig Conservatory, was considered an outstanding representative of the classical German musical tradition and, like Böhm, had a particular closeness to leading figures of the "Third Reich"<sup>2</sup>. Their recordings of the 3rd and 4th Piano Concertos do not fundamentally differ in overall duration from those of other interpreters, partly due to Backhaus's relatively short cadenzas.

**Interpretation and Reception.** Given the relatively minor interpretative differences in the performance of "exact music," one might question the validity of debates about the ranking and preference of leading conductors. Such discussions may often be driven by motives beyond musical interpretation. Considering the conductor's role as a figurehead representing universal values and morality, it is plausible to view them as symbolic representatives of particular cultural or ideological directions.

This dynamic became particularly evident during the 1970 Beethoven bicentennial, when the counterculture of the 1968 student movement challenged the traditional image of Beethoven. Mauricio Kagel's satirical television film *Ludwig van* caused a stir during this period. In one scene, Heinz-Klaus Metzger critiques Herbert von Karajan's interpretation of Beethoven during a discussion modeled after Werner Höfer's *Internationaler Frühschoppen* television

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5aW-ewA\\_gc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5aW-ewA_gc) WILHELM BACKHAUS TALKS ABOUT BEETHOVEN'S FOURTH PIANO CONCERTO OP. 58. The great German pianist talks about his favourite concerto. He noted that not a day goes by when he does not play the opening chords of the concerto. Wilhelm Backhaus 5:24 about Karl Böhm: 'He is an old friend of mine. I have known him since 1934/35, according to his kind words in my score. He writes simply and succinctly: "the unsurpassable". He must take responsibility for that.'

<sup>2</sup> Fred K. Prieberg. Handbuch Deutsche Musiker 1933–1945. CD-ROM. 2004/2005. P. 602–611.

program. Metzger's criticism highlights the perceived failures of bourgeois society as reflected in misguided performance practices<sup>1</sup>.

Such interpretive criticism is, at least in part, an extension of reception history, which has been particularly pronounced in the case of Beethoven since his lifetime. The lesser importance of Böhm as a Beethoven interpreter compared to Karajan reflects the broader divergence within the German reception of Beethoven, split between Austrian and Prussian traditions<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Loos, Helmut. E-Musik. P. 83–94: The Beethoven Year 1970, and P. 95–110: Beethoven as a Leading Figure. Notes on German musicology in the context of the 1968 movement.

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