



Herbert Von Karajan: A Life in Music

By Richard Osborne

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One of the greatest and most celebrated performing artists of the twentieth century, Herbert von Karajan (1908-1989) dazzled, intrigued, and intimidated the music world. As the young Karajan told his brother, "Whether it's conducting, skiing, or motor racing, I simply want to be the best." Richard Osborne draws on his own extensive conversations with Karajan, interviews with those who knew the conductor, and a treasure trove of primary sources to bring into focus the flamboyance and flaws of an extraordinary musician as well as the turbulent international music scene over six decades. The author debunks many legends about Karajan, particularly those relating to his membership in the Nazi Party, which he opportunistically joined in 1935 to obtain a conducting appointment. While the decision haunted him throughout his life, Karajan's career flourished after the war. A jet-setting superstar, he once held, simultaneously, six of the world's most prestigious musical posts, including director of the Salzburg Festival, artistic director of the Vienna State Opera, and conductor for life of the Berlin Philharmonic. After signing with legendary producer Walter Legge, Karajan achieved international fame through his best-selling recordings. He also embraced the challenge of adapting to rapidly changing technologies, and quickly mastered each new medium -- television, vinyl LPs, tapes, and CDs. This comprehensive, well-balanced, and objective biography will stand as the definitive work on this exceptional maestro.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Von Karajan (1908-1989), an Austrian-born conductor who was a controversial figure because of his membership in the Nazi party at an early stage of his career and because of his lifelong autocratic behavior, receives an exhaustive, penetrating biography. Music critic Osborne, who published *Conversations with von Karajan* shortly before the conductor's death, has drawn on a huge number of sources to create a notably balanced account of a career that still divides many music lovers into energetic pro and con parties. Von Karajan spent his early years as a provincial opera conductor and orchestra builder in Aachen (where he joined the Nazis as a career move in 1933), then endured years of struggle during the war--when, Osborne convincingly demonstrates, his career was in fact held back rather than encouraged by the Nazis because his wife was partly Jewish. It was not until after the war, when British record producer Walter Legge hired him for a series of recordings with his new Philharmonia Orchestra, that von Karajan began to build an international reputation. After a drawn-out struggle with Wilhelm Furtwangler, von Karajan took the helm of the Berlin Philharmonic. This, combined with his vastly successful recording contract with Deutsche Grammophon, finally established the conductor as a world figure whose wide-ranging recordings sold at almost pop-star levels. Osborne is particularly good at showing the wide swings in the quality of von Karajan's performances, from the totally committed to the polished but banal; his material on the conductor's now largely forgotten efforts (to which he devoted large sums of his own money) to immortalize his performances on videotape is riveting. Beautifully written, eminently fair-minded and full of enthralling anecdotes, this book will be catnip to any serious music lover. Photos.

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From Library Journal

Osborne, a respected British broadcaster and writer on classical music (*Conversations with Karajan*, LJ 4/1/90), here builds on documentation of Karajan's career compiled by the late Swedish writer and scholar Gisela Tamsen and adds information from his own decade-long research, including interviews with Karajan and Karajan's contemporaries. First published in Britain in 1998, this solid study aims to dispel many myths about Karajan, especially regarding his Nazi party membership. In 1935, he joined to obtain a conducting appointment, and Osborne provides the transcript of his "de-Nazification" hearing, attempting to clear Karajan's name once and for all. Karajan's recordings are his permanent legacy, and archives of recording companies were rich sources. The author reveals his musical taste and high opinion of Karajan's artistry; his gigantic book is both a chronicle of and critical commentary on a mighty musical career. Collectors of Karajan's recordings are the book's likely audience; recommended for public and academic libraries.

-*Bonnie Jo Dopp, Univ. of Maryland Libs., College Park*

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Review

"[Osborne's . . . fascinating biography, which no doubt will be definitive for the foreseeable future . . . helps put into perspective the political torment that beclouded 44 years of a transcendent musician's astonishing life." --Paul Moor Berlin, *Time*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Hans Diaz:

Now a day people that Living in the era everywhere everything reachable by connect to the internet and the resources included can be true or not call for people to be aware of each facts they get. How a lot more to be smart in getting any information nowadays? Of course the solution is reading a book. Studying a book can help people out of this uncertainty Information especially this Herbert Von Karajan: A Life in Music book as this book offers you rich info and knowledge. Of course the details in this book hundred pct guarantees there is no doubt in it as you know.

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