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HORENSTEIN

Conducts Berg and Schoenberg

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Horenstein's allegiance and devotion to Schoenberg and his school developed at a very early age. Following the First World War he became closely acquainted with several of Schoenberg's pupils and it was probably through one of them that, in May 1918, he attended ten public rehearsals of the *Chamber Symphony No. 1* given by the composer in Vienna.

By his own admission, we know that Horenstein also attended a number of Schoenberg's public lectures and that in 1918 registered as a member of his Society for Private Musical Performances, which was established following the ten rehearsals of the *Kammersymphonie*. It was probably at one of these occasions that he also met Berg and Webern for the first time and in later years it amused him to recall how these two key figures of twentieth century music then functioned as ushers in charge of controlling membership tickets at the entrance to those events.

The *Kammersymphonie* and *Verklärte Nacht*, two of the works Horenstein encountered at a young age, remained permanently in his repertoire. His first known performance of the latter took place in 1927 at one of his early concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic. The event attracted a large crowd that "flocked to receive the musical gospel," including Schoenberg, whose work was the main focus of the following day's reviews. "A real delight and a feast for the ears", wrote one critic, "in the conductor's highly expressive and disciplined hands the melody seems improvised," an observation confirmed and often repeated by other reviewers in different contexts throughout Horenstein's career. Schoenberg himself, according to the same critic, was delighted by the performance and "had to shout bravo" before joining Horenstein on stage for the applause.

Horenstein's relations with Webern were, in his own words, "very superficial", but with Alban Berg, whom he whimsically described as "a renaissance type with a touch of Oscar Wilde in him, tall, languid and very sophisticated", he developed a long and close friendship that only ended with the Austrian composer's premature death in 1935. During the Weimar era Horenstein attended the world premiere of *Wozzeck* in December 1925 and conducted several works by Berg in different places, including the world premiere in Berlin of the orchestral version of the *Lyric Suite*. In the early 1930s, as music director of the Düsseldorf Opera, Horenstein directed eleven fully-staged performances of *Wozzeck*, the opera's eighth presentation overall, which brought him and the Düsseldorf Opera nationwide celebrity, recognition and prestige. Berg attended the presentation of *Wozzeck*, including some of the rehearsals, and was also present at each of Horenstein's other performances of his music during that period.

After the Nazi takeover, Horenstein conducted the first performance in Belgium of Berg's *Violin Concerto* in 1938 with its dedicatee, Louis Krasner, as soloist. He did not perform his music again until November 1950 when he directed the French premiere of *Wozzeck* (attended by a very young Pierre Boulez, hearing the opera for the first time, "which left an immense impression"), and then on 24th January 1953 the world premiere of the *Altenberglieder* in Rome with soloist Elsa Cavelti. At the time there were doubts about whether the Rome performance was in fact a world premiere and the program booklet does not even mention it. Two of the five songs had had their first performances in Vienna in 1913 at a concert conducted by Schoenberg, but following hissing and interruptions by outraged members of the audience incensed by the music's uncompromising, abstract modernity as well as by Altenberg's aphoristic texts, fist fights broke out, a pistol was drawn, the police had to be called in and the concert was abandoned. Known subsequently as the *Skandalkonzert*, this event, like the riots that attended the premiere in Paris of the *Rite of Spring* a few months later, caused one of the greatest tumults in musical history.

Further research has confirmed that the performance in Rome was in fact the complete work's world premiere, but although the concert was promoted by the Italian state broadcaster RAI, and performed by its orchestra, no copy of the broadcast recording has been found. Horenstein conducted the work again in Florence (soloist Eugenia Zareska) and in London (with Irma Kolássi) but the performance presented here, documenting the French premiere given in Paris on 4th May 1953 just four months after its world premiere in Rome, is the only one of these to have been preserved on record.

Misha Horenstein (A full version of this essay can be found online)

Horenstein

conducts Berg and Schoenberg

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STEREO



BERG

Altenberglieder (world première recording)
Irma Kolássi, Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française

SCHOENBERG

Verklärte Nacht
Chamber Symphony No. 1
Orchestra of the Southwest German Radio

Live and Studio recordings, 1953 & 1957

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph of
Jascha Horenstein and Alban Berg taken
during the 1930 Düsseldorf Opera
production of *Wozzeck*

Special thanks to Misha Horenstein for
the archive recordings, photographs and
notes used in preparing this release

Total duration: 67:11

BERG *Altenberglieder*

(Five Songs on picture-postcard texts by Peter Altenberg) Op. 4

1. Seele, wie bist du schöner (3:10)
2. Sahst du nach dem Gewitterregen den Wald? (1:19)
3. Über die Grenzen des Alls (1:43)
4. Nichts ist gekommen (1:29)
5. Hier ist Friede (4:11)

Irma Kolássi *mezzo-soprano*

Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française

Live broadcast, 4 May 1953 - French première performance

A world première recording

6 SCHOENBERG *Verklärte Nacht*

(Transfigured Night), Op.4 (29:07)

7 SCHOENBERG *Chamber Symphony No. 1*

(Kammersymphonie) Op. 9b (26:12)

Orchestra of the Southwest German Radio (SWDR)

Studio rec. October 1957

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Jascha Horenstein *conductor*

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