



Horenstein

conducts Mahler - Symphony No. 1



In November 1922, while still a student, Jascha Horenstein made his professional debut conducting Mahler's then still controversial First Symphony with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. The event took place in the *Musikvereinsaal* "where Mahler used to give his concerts", as he was fond of reminding his interlocutors. In the *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna's most prestigious newspaper, Horenstein was perceived as "toiling mightily with his interpretation", and was characterized as "without question a fanatic, obsessed by Mahler's music and by his own mission." The words 'fanatic' and 'obsessed' were used commonly by reviewers of his concerts during the Weimar era.

In the years following his Vienna debut, Mahler's First became something of a musical calling card for Horenstein, including for his first appearance with the Berlin Philharmonic in October 1926, a concert attended by Berthold Goldschmidt who described the performance as "fiery and fanatical, full of dynamic exaggerations, but with a clear profile". Horenstein also chose the symphony for his debut in Frankfurt less than a year later where, according to Adorno, he was favorably compared to the young Mahler by some who had seen and heard the Bohemian composer in action. Thereafter Horenstein conducted the work at least two dozen times in different places before making the present recording of the symphony for Vox Records in Vienna in February 1953.

The first reviews were not encouraging. In May 1953 Harold C. Schonberg in the New York Times thought that "Horenstein toys around with the music too much. He tends toward sentimentality; he underlines phrases that need no underlining, and there is a consequent lack of subtlety", while in the UK the influential Gramophone magazine ended its review by suggesting that owners of a rival version need not bother adding Horenstein's recording to their collections!

History has not validated those early reviews and for the next twenty years Horenstein's Mahler First, owing to his unusually lucid grasp of its complexities, became the recording against which all the others were measured, until he re-recorded it in stereo. Its great warmth and spontaneity, executed in a style that would have been familiar to the audiences of Mahler's time, and Horenstein's complete engagement and identification with Mahler's idiom, account for its appeal, despite the inferior recorded sound and some less than stellar orchestral execution. Horenstein's interpretation, quite unlike anyone else's, is notable for its clear textures, his carefully balanced buildup and release of tension in the first and last movements, for the rustic exuberance of the scherzo, and for the alluring blend of poignancy, parody and sentimentality, with its judicious and tasteful use of portamento, in both the first and third movements. In the finale, the strength and weight of powerfully controlled climaxes in the turbulent sections are offset and complemented by a charm and elegance in the lyrical moments that underline its authentic, old-world, Viennese character. Often hailed as one of the handful of great interpretations of this work, Horenstein's carefully measured, lovingly shaped reading continues to attract admirers more than sixty years after its first appearance on disc.

Misha Horenstein



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MAHLER SYMPHONY No. 1
HORENSTEIN, VIENNA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

horenstein

conducts mahler

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photograph of Jascha Horenstein

Mahler Symphony No. 1
Recorded in Vienna, February 1953
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Total duration: 57:43

MAHLER Symphony No. 1 in D major

- 1st mvt. - Langsam, schleppend - Immer sehr gemächlich (16:52)
- 2nd mvt. - Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell, Recht gemächlich (8:20)
- 3rd mvt. - Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen (11:40)
- 4th mvt. - Stürmisch bewegt - Energisch (20:51)

Vienna Symphony Orchestra

conducted by Jascha Horenstein

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