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HORENSTEIN Conducts Mozart

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Jascha Horenstein developed his lifelong enthusiasm for vocal and choral music during his student days at Berlin's Hochschule für Musik, where for three years he served as an assistant to Siegfried Ochs, head of the school's choral department and founder and long-time director of the Berlin Philharmonic Choir. It was during choir rehearsals for Ochs at the Hochschule for a performance of Bach's *B Minor Mass* in November 1921 that Horenstein was first noticed by Furtwängler, who encouraged him to pursue a conducting career, while Ochs himself described his assistant as "one of the few conductors who really understood something about vocal music". According to Berthold Goldschmidt, a fellow student at the Hochschule, "it was from Ochs, the collaborator of Nikisch and Mahler, that Horenstein learned the important technique of approaching the large scale developing traits of a composition from a psychological perspective."¹

Horenstein's first regular conducting experience also started during his student years when, in May 1922, he succeeded Hermann Scherchen as conductor of two large choruses in Berlin, the *Schubertchor* and the *Gemischtechor Gross-Berlin*, positions he held for six years. Goldschmidt recalled the occasion in his memoirs:

[Horenstein] soon left our master class for composition and Schreker's seminar, in order to occupy himself with the more practical side of music making. He founded a choir of factory workers, with which he gave astonishingly good and lively concerts. These concerts were mostly without instrumental accompaniment, and included difficult works by Bartók and Schoenberg. The a capella choir and its radical conductor soon obtained a remarkable reputation.

Horenstein was a difficult taskmaster. Membership in the choirs involved participation in a comprehensive concert and educational program that included weekly lessons in solfeggio, sight-reading and voice training, as well as courses on the history and sociology of music. At some point into his stewardship he instituted the regular keeping of attendance lists, excluding people from the choirs for absenteeism or undisciplined behavior, conduct that always tried his patience, which caused a certain amount of friction and member turnover. Horenstein's programs were also a subject of contention. One choir member complained that the choral works of Bartók and the Finnish composer Selim Palmgren, which were performed regularly, were too difficult and wrote that "many singers were of the opinion that the conductor made almost unachievable demands." In some instances these included Horenstein's insistence that the choirs learn and perform difficult pieces by heart. Despite or because of this, during the Weimar years his choral concerts attracted much favorable attention from Berlin's most important critics, which led to engagements with orchestras and eventually to his appointment at the Düsseldorf Opera in September 1928, the start of a five year period of intense activity with singers and choruses.

After leaving Germany in 1933 Horenstein had much less contact with choral music but always relished the chance to include it in concerts when opportunities came his way. In 1953 he wrote to Karol Rathaus that he "enjoyed immensely" working with the chorus for a performance of *Boris Godunov* in Italy and that "there is simply nothing so wonderful in interpretation like working with voices". He later described the human voice as "the most musically expressive instrument there is", and whenever he included choral music in his concerts he invariably insisted on taking separate choir rehearsals himself, sometimes against the wishes of the chorus masters concerned. Indeed, some of his most successful performances, from Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* to the Brahms Requiem to Mahler's Eighth Symphony, involved extensive work with choirs and soloists and the same can be said for the two Mozart items presented here, possibly Horenstein's first stereo recordings, in which the celebrated Viennese chorus and soloists give him their most refined, stylish and rhythmically vital singing, with phrasing of unusual attention and delicacy.

Misha Horenstein

¹Berthold Goldschmidt - *Komponist und Dirigent : ein Musiker-Leben zwischen Hamburg, Berlin und London*, Von Bockel Verlag, Hamburg (2003)

Horenstein

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STEREO

conducts

MOZART

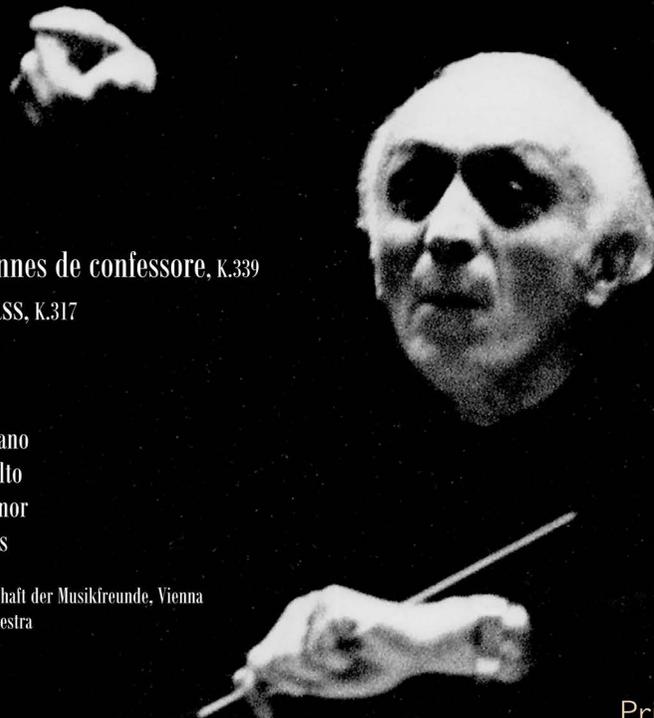
Vesperae solennes de confessore, K.339
Coronation Mass, K.317

Wilma Lipp, soprano
Christa Ludwig, alto
Murray Dickie, tenor
Walter Berry, bass

Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, Vienna
Vienna Symphony Orchestra

Studio recordings, 1956

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Konzerthaus, Vienna

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Jascha Horenstein

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Total duration: 57:38

MOZART Vesperae solennes de confessore, K. 339

- 1. Dixit Dominus Domino meo (3:59)
- 2. Confitebor tibi, Domine (6:09)
- 3. Beatus vir qui timet Dominum (4:41)
- 4. Laudate pueri Dominum (5:52)
- 5. Laudate Dominum omnes gentes (4:43)
- 6. Magnificat anima mea (5:38)

MOZART Mass in C, "Coronation", K.317

- 1. Kyrie (3:15)
- 2. Gloria (4:23)
- 3. Credo (7:11)
- 4. Sanctus (1:59)
- 5. Benedictus (3:39)
- 6. Agnus Dei (6:09)

Wilma Lipp *soprano*

Christa Ludwig *alto*

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