

"Once performances of intricate and elaborately marked works, in which the composer has left relatively little room for individual interpretation of the sort which can be brought, say, to a Beethoven symphony—once such performances get above a certain level, then I find it devilish hard to choose between one and another. Now Karajan, in this new disc, comes slap up against comparisons with Ansermet. At first hearings I despaired of reaching a conclusion; but on repeated playings an initial slight preference for the German conductor and English players became increasingly strong. It is largely a matter of tone-colour. The Decca disc realises a great deal of the thrilling and gorgeous colour of Debussy's score; but in the Columbia the colours glow even brighter. This, you say, should have decided me at once. But Ansermet's readings have a particular kind of translucency about them which I find most seductive. It is this attractive quality which makes me waver continually in my preference for one or other of the two *Heures Espagnoles* the Decca or the Vox. And, on the other hand, with Karajan I always have to overcome some initial prejudice—I don't mean prejudice before the music has begun, but after the first few phrases. I tend to feel that he is playing everything for effect, that he is making things larger than life, and so on. In the end I nearly always capitulate and humbly admit that I was wrong from the start, that he is a great conductor—of Richard Strauss, of Beethoven, of Debussy, Ravel, whatever it may be. I need hardly say, since he is conducting the Philharmonia, that the orchestral playing is superb. So is the recording."

A. P., *The Gramophone*, February 1954 (excerpt) — on the Ravel (coupled with Debussy)

For all that the Beecham record of the *L'Arlésienne* suites is such a favourite of mine, there is no doubt that this Karajan performance is in its way of the highest class too. It is often very different, even in a basic matter like speed, the speed chosen for *Carillon*, for example, where Beecham swings the bells slowly, Karajan quite quickly (but don't Continental bells toll heavily rather than briskly?); and in subtler ways of interpretation the differences are as great. But Karajan gets beautiful and brilliant performances, superb playing from the Philharmonia and a first-rate recording. And what may well sway the choice, there is the *Carmen* Suite of four extra pieces on his disc, a remarkable amount of extra music. (It consists of the *Prelude* and the *Entr'actes* to the other Acts.)

If I say that the recorded quality of this record is even better than the Beecham, that is not to say that the Beecham will disappoint. The same is true of the difference between the Karajan stereo and mono, where the stereo is only just that bit more "sorted out", more vivid and true. In making a choice between Karajan and Beecham you can, in fact, reasonably not worry about their sound—unless you put hi-fi before music.

T. H., *The Gramophone*, September 1959 — on the Bizet

It is fascinating to read these reviews of Karajan in the post-war years, clearly and consistently being recognised as one of the great conductors of his time. The fact of him being a German conductor playing French music, something which seemed to count against Furtwängler with many critics of the day, seems not to have been an obstacle for the younger man (I say "younger" advisedly — he was already forty-five years old when the Ravel and Chabrier recordings were made in July 1953).

Both sets of recordings were fine examples of their day, technically — and yet both have benefited greatly from being XR-remastered, a process which has enriched and clarified the sound of both the mono and stereo recordings here, as well as accentuating the brilliance of the orchestral top ends. In the case of the 1953 Ravel and Chabrier recordings we also offer the extra sense of space and air that Ambient Stereo brings, without compromising the original central, mono sound source.

Andrew Rose



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KARAJAN CONDUCTS FRENCH MUSIC: BIZET, RAVEL, CHABRIER  
KARAJAN, PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

# karajan

conducts french music

## BIZET L'Arlésienne, Suite No. 1

1. 1. Prélude (7:00)
2. 2. Menuet (3:16)
3. 3. Adagietto (3:04)
4. 4. Carillon (4:07)

## BIZET L'Arlésienne, Suite No. 2

5. 1. Pastorale (6:26)
6. 2. Intermezzo (also known as Agnus Dei) (5:24)
7. 3. Menuet - from Scènes bohémiennes (No.3) (4:11)
8. 4. Farandole (3:33)

## BIZET Carmen, Suite No. 1

9. 2. Aragonaise (2:24)
10. 3. Intermezzo (2:58)
11. 5. Les dragons d'Alcala (1:36)
12. 6. Les toréadors (2:27)

## RAVEL Rapsodie espagnole

13. 1. Prélude à la nuit. Très modéré (4:46)
14. 2. Malagueña. Assez vif (2:03)
15. 3. Habanera. Assez lent et d'un rythme las (2:30)
16. 4. Feria. Assez animé (6:21)

## 17. CHABRIER España, rhapsody for orchestra (5:44)

## 18. CHABRIER Joyeuse marche (4:00)

Philharmonia Orchestra  
conducted by Herbert von Karajan

COMPACT  
disc  
DIGITAL AUDIO  
PASC 705

XR Remastered by  
Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based  
on a photograph of  
Herbert von Karajan, 1954

Recordings made at  
Kingsway Hall, London

Recording dates:  
Tracks 1-8: 14 & 15 Jan, 1958  
Tracks 9-12: 16 Jan, 1958  
*Stereo recordings*

Tracks 13-16: 16-17 Jul, 1953  
Tracks 17-18: 17 Jul, 1953  
*Mono recordings*  
*Presented in Ambient Stereo*

Total duration: 71:50

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