

**LUCERNE
FESTIVAL**

HISTORIC
PERFORMANCES

audite



Herbert von Karajan

The Early Lucerne Years, 1952–1957

Philharmonia Orchestra | Swiss Festival Orchestra

Géza Anda | Robert Casadesus | Clara Haskil | Nathan Milstein

Herbert von Karajan

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 8 in F major, Op. 93

- I. *Allegro vivace e con brio* 9:44
- II. *Allegretto scherzando* 4:02
- III. *Tempo di Menuetto* 5:28
- IV. *Allegro vivace* 7:52

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756-1791)
Piano Concerto in C minor, K. 491

- I. *Allegro* 13:14
- II. *Larghetto* 8:37
- III. *Allegretto* 8:26

Wolfgang Amadé Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)
Concerto for Two Pianos and
Orchestra in C major, BWV 1061*

- I. [*Allegro*] 7:40
- II. *Adagio ovvero Largo* 4:28
- III. *Fuga* 5:29

Robert Casadesus piano (Mozart)
Clara Haskil | Géza Anda piano (Bach)
Swiss Festival Orchestra
Herbert von Karajan

Lucerne, Kunsthau, 16 August 1952 &
Lucerne, Kunsthau, 10 August 1955*

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827)
Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 *Pastoral*

- I. *Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arriving
in the countryside. Allegro ma non troppo* 11:20
- II. *Scene by the brook. Andante molto moto* 11:16
- III. *Merry gathering of country folk. Allegro –* 2:56
- IV. *Thunderstorm. Allegro –* 3:23
- V. *Shepherd's Hymn: Happy and thankful
feelings after the storm. Allegretto* 9:17

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

- I. *Allegro non troppo* 13:18
- II. *Andante moderato* 12:02
- III. *Allegro giocoso – Poco meno presto – Tempo I* 6:11
- IV. *Allegro energico e passionato – Più Allegro* 10:23

Philharmonia Orchestra
Herbert von Karajan

Lucerne, Kunsthau, 6 September 1956

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
Violin Concerto in D major, Op. 77

- I. *Allegro non troppo* 20:33
- II. *Adagio* 8:51
- III. *Allegro giocoso, ma non troppo vivace –
Poco più presto* 8:23

Arthur Honegger (1892-1955)
Symphony No. 3 *Liturgique**

- I. *Dies irae. Allegro marcato* 6:56
- II. *De profundis clamavi. Adagio* 13:06
- III. *Dona nobis pacem. Andante – Adagio* 12:02

Nathan Milstein violin
Swiss Festival Orchestra
Herbert von Karajan

Lucerne, Kunsthau, 17 August 1957 &
Lucerne, Kunsthau, 10 August 1955*

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan arrives at the Kunsthhaus with his second wife Anita, presumably 1949 © Lisa Meyerlist, Staatsarchiv Luzern FDC 102/2575

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan rehearsing with the Swiss Festival Orchestra, presumably 1949,
Max A. Wyss © Stiftung Fotodok, source: Staatsarchiv Luzern FDC 76/2119

“Clarity of structure”

Herbert von Karajan’s early Lucerne live recordings

As this edition assembles for the first time selected concert recordings made in the 1950s of Herbert von Karajan at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, today’s Lucerne Festival, it exposes the inherent dilemma associated with approaching the artistic legacy of this “once-in-a-century” conductor. Given his meteoric career and world-spanning activities, how can one decide which places and festivals, which musical and organisational partners were, or would become, particularly important for Karajan, leaving aside “his” orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, which he conducted from 1956 until the end of his life? Even in quantitative terms the list of his concerts is unprecedented: if one subtracts Karajan’s early – but clearly remarkable – appearances as a piano virtuoso between 1917 and 1927, the official count of the Salzburg Karajan Institute yields the seemingly unbelievable number of 3,392 conducted performances during the six decades between 1928 and 1989, i.e. an average of 55 concerts per year. And in addition to this workload, there is Karajan’s no less significant, almost obsessive, recording activity, with 2,333 commercial recordings as well as his work as an opera and music film director!

A possible answer to this question can be found by looking at contemporary history, or more precisely, the political caesura of National Socialist rule in Germany from 1933, which was to culminate in the Second World War and the Shoah six years later. There is a clear distinction between Karajan’s activities before and after 1945, as his rise – for reasons that are still controversial today – was inextricably linked to the political situation in Germany. Until 1939, he conducted mainly in the German Reich, where he held permanent positions in Ulm, Aachen and Berlin, as well as in Austria, which was “annexed” to Germany in 1938. He also occasionally performed in Belgium (Brussels), the Netherlands (Amsterdam) and once each in Greece (Athens) and Sweden (Stockholm). During the war, his ongoing concerts in Germany and Austria were supplemented by appearances in Italy, Spain and Romania, countries allied with Nazi Germany, as well as in occupied Denmark and France. Karajan’s guest performances in Paris in 1940, 1941 and 1944 – at his hearing before the Denazification Committee he would recall only one of them – served as important propaganda, adding cultural triumph to France’s military humiliation. It is therefore no coincidence that a newsreel recording of the Paris *Tristan* performance from 1941 exists – an evening which Karajan supposedly opened with the “Horst Wessel Song”.

During the first decade of his career – which began in 1930, when the 22-year-old was engaged as First Kapellmeister at the Ulm Stadttheater and promoted, in 1939, to “Staatskapellmeister” of the Berlin Staatskapelle – Karajan had already conducted the Vienna and Berlin Philharmonic Orchestras. His first engagement with the former took place in Salzburg in 1934 – the latter he conducted for the first time in Berlin in 1938. In 1933 he made his debut at the Salzburg Festival, in 1937 at the Vienna State Opera, and in the same year he conducted his first complete performance of Wagner’s *Ring* cycle in Aachen, where he held his second permanent position. From 1938, Heinz Tietjen, Generalintendant of the Prussian State Theatres and an archenemy of Wilhelm Furtwängler, groomed him as Furtwängler’s challenger and as the new Berlin conducting star. This dazzling development was severely curtailed in 1942 when Furtwängler successfully sidelined Karajan’s industrious agent Rudolf Vedder. However, in 1944 Karajan, alongside fourteen other performing stars, was included in the so-called list of “divinely gifted” prominent artists who were exempt from military service. In addition, he – as well as Furtwängler – was one of the chosen conductors allowed to direct the Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester in Linz, which had been founded by Hitler.

Herbert von Karajan

audite



Herbert von Karajan at Lucerne's Strandbad Lido, undated (presumably 1948),
Max A. Wyss © Stiftung Fotodok, source: Staatsarchiv Luzern FDC 76/1856.x

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan, together with Walter Giesecking, Festival President Walter Strebi and Walter Legge (from left to right), serves as the judging panel at an alphorn competition, 1954 © Jean Schneider, Archive Lucerne Festival

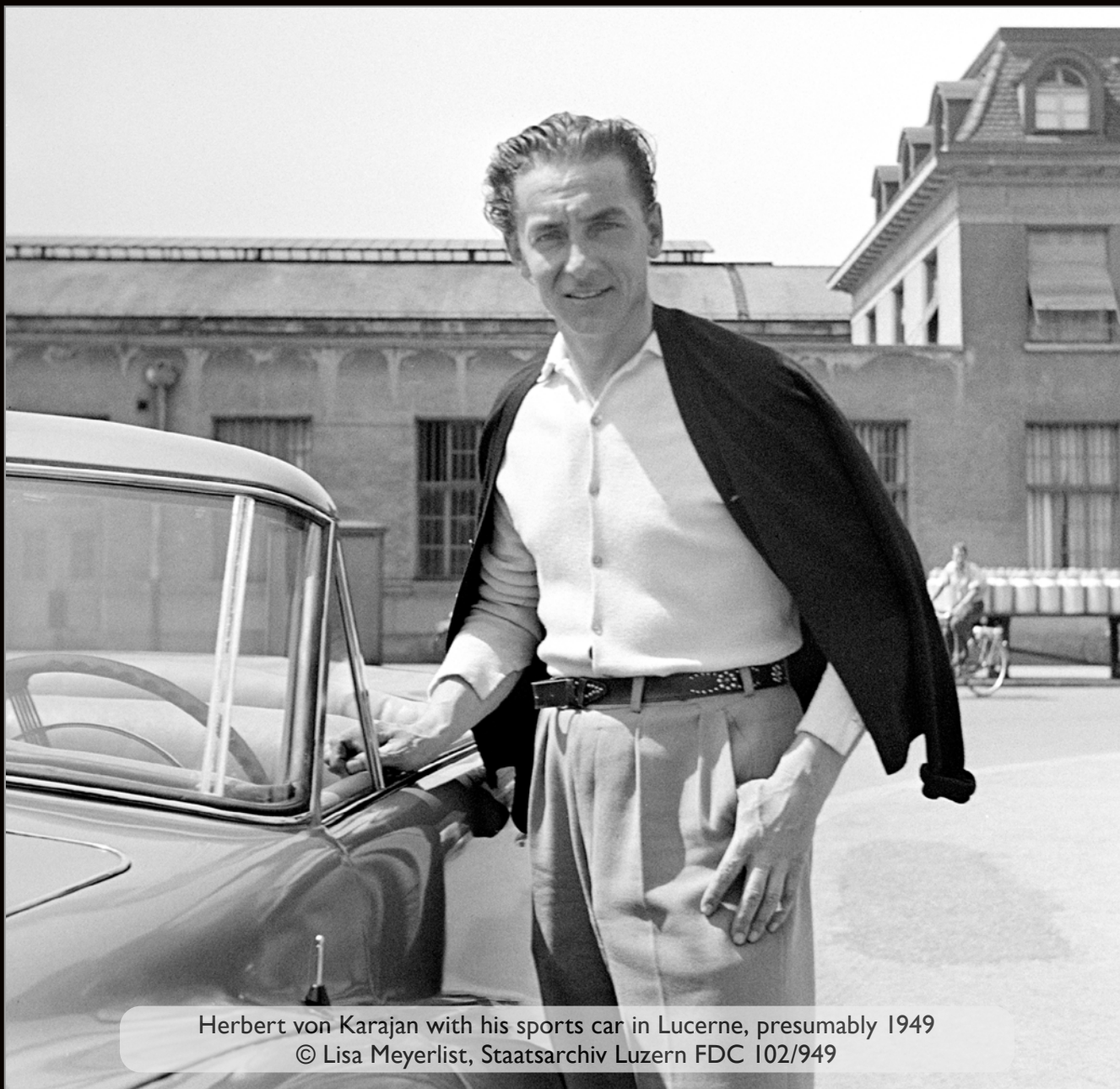
In February 1945, Karajan and his second wife, Anita Gütermann, who hailed from a German-Jewish industrialist family and was therefore branded a “quarter-Jew”, left Berlin, which had already been largely destroyed, and experienced the end of the war in Milan and Trieste. When he returned to Salzburg during the second half of the year, the would-be inexorable rise of the now 37-year-old was abruptly halted. Karajan was not only compromised by his extensive activities in the service of Nazi Germany, but also by his “double” membership of the NSDAP. (He had joined the party in April 1933, first in Salzburg, and, at the instigation of the party bureaucracy, was then registered in 1939, retroactively from May 1933, in Ulm; there is no evidence of a withdrawal from the party in 1942, as claimed by Karajan). For the outcome of the denazification proceedings, which were carried out in the American occupation zone of Salzburg by an Austrian commission on behalf of the Information Services Branch of the US Army, Karajan had to hope that, above all, his party membership as an Austrian citizen would not be an issue, especially since the NSDAP had been banned in Austria as early as June 1933. Moreover, Vienna, now the most important musical centre for him, was under Soviet occupation, who applied even stricter standards to denazification. And the French, who had not forgotten Karajan’s concerts in Paris, also had an important say in the matter. The tangled events surrounding Karajan’s rehabilitation, which were determined by conflicting interests (the Viennese historian Oliver Rathkolb meticulously reconstructed them), finally ended in October 1947: Karajan’s official performing ban was lifted. In the same month, Karajan was heard once again with the Vienna Philharmonic; symbolically enough, joint performances of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony were to follow in December of the same year.

Against this background, it was all the more important for Karajan that the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern invited him in 1948, which also marked the festival’s tenth anniversary. This invitation was not so much a proof of Switzerland’s neutrality but rather a generous signal of a return to the circle of great interpreters, which Lucerne had also provided for Wilhelm Furtwängler – who was even more heavily incriminated – during the previous summer. It was also the first time Karajan had ever conducted in Switzerland. This guest appearance was to blossom into a lifelong relationship with the festival.

On 25 August 1948 Karajan made his debut with the Swiss Festival Orchestra and the pianist Wilhelm Backhaus, with whom he had already performed in the 1930s. The programme included Mozart’s Symphony in B flat major, K. 319, Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and Brahms’ Second Piano Concerto. Karajan’s final concert in Lucerne, now with the Berlin Philharmonic, took place on 31 August 1988, less than a year before his death. Once again, he had programmed music by Brahms, this time the First Symphony, combining it with Schoenberg’s *Verklärte Nacht* in the version for string orchestra. These concerts bookended no fewer than 65 further performances which captivated the Lucerne audience year after year – with the exception of the summer of 1960. As early as 1961, and then each year from 1968, Karajan and his “Berliners” were to appear on two consecutive evenings, performing different programmes: a privilege that had previously only been granted to Wilhelm Furtwängler.

The enthusiasm of the Swiss music critics, hardly ever clouded by objections, was also constant and regularly evoked Karajan’s exceptional talent. In 1948, the *Bieler Tagblatt* wrote about the conductor’s festival debut, “that he represents a great hope for us, and that, certainly in German-speaking countries, there are very few talents of similar calibre”. The “superior rendition” of the Mozart symphony “electrified the audience, and the great impression increased even more with the powerful, yet always stylish accompaniment of the Brahms piano concerto”. Beethoven’s Fifth was also performed “with unprecedented artistic intensity”. In his review, the critic of *Die Tat* already noted an important characteristic of Karajan’s interpretive approach when he observed that his “musical impulses [...] were dominated throughout by the will for clarity

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan with his sports car in Lucerne, presumably 1949
© Lisa Meyerlist, Staatsarchiv Luzern FDC 102/949

of structure and the desire to present the spiritual content of a composition". Four decades later, at his last appearance, Karajan was a living legend who – according to the headline in the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* – spread a “touch of the supernatural” in Lucerne. Peter Hagmann of the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* was nevertheless impressed by how Karajan “leaned into the music with movements that made his physical decline entirely obvious, but left no doubt about his defiant will. In any case, this performance did not look like a swan song – and it certainly didn’t sound like one either”.

With this, Hagmann once again summed up the impression that runs like a golden thread through most reviews of Karajan’s Lucerne performances, and which was ultimately independent of the orchestras with whom he appeared: the energy, precision and succinctness of his music-making are emphasised, as well as his fidelity to the score (with which he, once again, positioned himself as Furtwängler’s antipode, instead expressing his closeness to the conductor Richard Strauss). All this was perceived not so much as a consequence of the objectivisation of musical interpretation which had emerged as a new ideal in the 1920s and to which Karajan was undoubtedly also committed. Rather, the spirit and letter of the work of art seemed to be brought into an exemplary balance, which Karajan demonstrated in Lucerne with a broad repertoire: from Bach’s Mass in B minor to Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex*, from a Haydn symphony to Honegger’s *Symphonie liturgique*. He thus presented himself as a conductor who was “modern” in the best sense of the word, who preserved traditions whilst at the same time keenly underlining contemporary relevance, therefore appealing to all generations of the audience. Whereas before 1945 Karajan had styled himself as a wild genius (with a shock of hair reminiscent of Franz Liszt, as Christian Thielemann aptly observed), in Lucerne, he reinvented himself to a certain extent: energetic, elegant and innovative, calculatingly using his charisma with both musicians and audiences.

Unlike the authoritative Karajan biographies and hagiographies by Hausserman, Vaughan and Osborne, to whom Lucerne hardly seems worth mentioning in contrast to the established music capitals of London, Paris, Berlin, Salzburg and Vienna, the Karajan volume which appeared around 1956 as part of the series *Die großen Interpreten* [The Great Performers], published by Kister in Geneva, illustrates how crucial Lucerne was to be for the new Karajan image. Bernard Gavoty, an influential music critic at *Le Figaro*, wrote the text in the form of an open letter to Karajan. Numerous added photos taken by Roger Hauert cleverly put the conductor in the limelight – as a photo model, as a ruler in the concert hall, as a technophile listening to his recordings and, crucially, as a charismatic teacher during a conducting course he gave at the Festwochen in 1955.

Gavoty describes the live recording of 10 August 1955 included in our edition, when Karajan performed works by Bach and Honegger with the Swiss Festival Orchestra, Clara Haskil and Géza Anda (unfortunately the second half of the concert featuring Brahms’ Second Symphony does not survive), as follows: “Last night I was at the Lucerne Kunsthaus. [...] You will [...] agree with me that the quality of the orchestra was not what I would have hoped for you and what you are, in fact, used to finding in two places – Berlin and London – without mentioning the many other orchestras you conduct here and there. [...] For the performance of the Bach Double Concerto in C major this hardly mattered, as the two soloists [...] attracted all the attention. Moreover, the orchestra’s role is relatively insignificant, as it is limited to underpinning the dialogue of the two soloists and only becomes more prominent in occasional tutti passages. As for you, I noticed your restraint and admired the fact that you were so calm and almost immobile.”

Here Karajan is described as an ideal accompanist, supporting his soloists and allowing them to unfold. The Lucerne recordings of Mozart’s C minor Concerto K. 491 with Robert Casadesus (16 August 1952) and of the Brahms Violin Concerto with Nathan Milstein (17 August 1957) also demonstrate this, especially with regard to the dialogue between soloist

and orchestra, which is always “symphonic” and not merely *concertante*. Asked about his ideal performance, Géza Anda once replied without hesitation that he could only imagine such a thing with Karajan. Dinu Lipatti would doubtless have given the same answer: in 1950, together with Karajan, he gave a legendary interpretation of Mozart’s Piano Concerto in C major, K. 467, in Lucerne, which was also to be the final performance with an orchestra given by the terminally ill pianist. (Since the recording of this performance has already been issued several times, it is not included in our edition, which aims to make previously unknown audio documents accessible).

But when the ensemble itself became the hero of the instrumental drama, Karajan also allowed the Swiss Festival Orchestra to rise above itself. Gavoty had nothing but praise for the performance of Arthur Honegger’s expressive and monumental *Symphonie liturgique*: “Without a matching performer, even the greatest composer remains silent. And on this evening in particular, you were this ideal interpreter, who knew how to exploit the entire spiritual content of this work. Since you are, by your nature, attached to tragedy, you did not need to feign these emotions. You elevated the work into a supersensible sphere by transferring the ardour of your personality into this music, revealing its inherent genius. [...] You were, in the truest sense of the word, the medium who knew how to spin the mysterious thread between the work and the listener.” The 16-year-old high school student Heinz Holliger felt similarly, as we learn from a letter written to the conductor Paul Sacher, dated 11 August 1955: “Last night I was allowed to attend the symphony concert at the Lucerne Festival. I have never heard such a wonderful concert before. The playing of Clara Haskil and Anda [...] was of the highest maturity and persuasiveness. The greatest experience for me was Honegger’s Liturgical Symphony, which meant more to me than the most beautiful church service. I heard the work for the first time. The effect was overwhelming.”

Not all Karajan’s Lucerne appearances produced such stellar performances, which is why the recording of Sibelius’ Fifth Symphony with the Swiss Festival Orchestra from August 1952, which has also been preserved, was not included in this 3-CD box set. That decision may sadden some of his international admirers, but on the other hand it is comforting to know that even a musical “superhuman” had his limits. However, the concert of 1 September 1951, when Karajan celebrated Bach’s Mass in B minor alongside the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Vienna Singverein and Elisabeth Schwarzkopf, Elsa Cavelti, Ernst Haefliger and Hans Braun, is made available as a downloadable bonus track: a fascinating sonic document thanks to Karajan’s very personal approach, even if stylistically it feels far removed.

Willi Schuh noted in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* that Karajan had performed “his’ B minor Mass”. Karajan’s second guest performance with the Philharmonia Orchestra on 6 September 1956, however, was rated as unequivocally laudable by Schuh. He enthused about the “undreamt of transparency reminiscent of chamber music” with which Karajan interpreted Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony*, and he praised “the conductor’s unique art of creating enormous tectonic tensions” in the chaconne finale of Brahms’ Fourth Symphony, which he described as having been lifted into a “high tragic sphere”.

Wolfgang Rathert

Translation: Viola Scheffel

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan in conversation with Antonio Tusa, principal cellist of the Swiss Festival Orchestra, 1948, Archive Lucerne Festival

**“I will always be indebted to Lucerne”
Herbert von Karajan in Lucerne**

When Herbert von Karajan was awarded the Lucerne Art Prize in 1969, he confessed in his acceptance speech, “I am particularly grateful that [...] Lucerne was the first city to invite me to conduct again outside my own country. I will always be indebted”. He kept his word and was to leave his mark on the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern, today’s Lucerne Festival, for almost four decades. “To conduct again” – this meant that the festival organisers, after Karajan had gone through the denazification procedure and his conducting ban had been lifted in October 1947, immediately engaged him for his first concert outside Austria. According to Robert C. Bachmann this came with the assurance: “What was said about you and done against you is none of our business. You are welcome here and you may always come.”

Karajan and the Swiss Festival Orchestra

According to the meeting minutes of the organising committee, Karajan’s festival debut on 25 August 1948 was a “major success”. The legendary Zurich music writer and critic Willi Schuh commented in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*: “The first appearance of the Austrian conductor, whose name is already associated with legendary fame due to his work in Aachen, Berlin, Vienna and Salzburg, took place in an atmosphere of almost feverishly tense expectation. The tremendous energy emanating from this agile and slender man, who unites intelligence and vitality in a very personal way, and whose concentration and focus bear a fanatical streak, were always bound to have a fascinating effect on our orchestra and audience.”

Karajan was immediately re-engaged for the opening concert of the following year and subsequently came to Lucerne year after year. Until 1958, when he introduced the Berlin Philharmonic (who had appointed him as their principal conductor two years previously) to the festival, he conducted the Swiss Festival Orchestra (not to be confused with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, launched by Claudio Abbado in 2003) each time. There were two exceptions: in 1951 he appeared with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, and in 1954 and 1956 he stood on the podium alongside the Philharmonia Orchestra, with whom he had been closely associated since 1946.

According to the bassoonist Rudolf Leuzinger, who had played an important role in founding the Festival Orchestra and who was involved in its management and administration until 1953, “Karajan corresponded more to the Toscanini type, albeit without his irritability, but also without the amiable empathy of the Italian. Karajan strove to make his whole way of life artistic in a certain sense. Arbitrariness was alien to him.” My former percussion teacher Fritz Schiesser, who was the orchestra’s timpanist at the time, told me that there was a rumour among the musicians that one actually had to pay to be allowed to play in Karajan’s rehearsals, adding with a laugh: “If they had had the money ...” Schiesser also showed me a letter from Karajan in which he praised him as the ideal timpanist, wanting to engage him in Berlin. In other words: Karajan, for his part, held the orchestra in high esteem. This is also confirmed in a letter to Leuzinger: “It is the work which goes above and beyond the usual concert business: in the best sense of the word, a co-operation between conductor and orchestra.” It was also in Lucerne that Karajan discovered the violinist Michel Schwalbé, who was concertmaster in the Swiss Festival Orchestra and whom he beckoned to Berlin to take up the same position.

Herbert von Karajan



Signing session with Herbert von Karajan, undated
© Jean Schneider, Archive Lucerne Festival

Karajan and Furtwängler

As elsewhere, the relationship between the “antipopes” Wilhelm Furtwängler and Karajan led to discussions in Lucerne. The concept of the festival provided room for both, with rehearsals and concerts scheduled in such a way that neither interfered with the other’s territory. Karajan, the younger of the two, had to yield to Furtwängler. There was an unwritten rule that Furtwängler was entitled to conduct two concerts per festival; furthermore, his fee had to be the highest – the festival’s president, Walter Strebi, had stipulated this. Nevertheless, Karajan and Furtwängler met on 23 August 1948, when Strebi received the two antipodes as well as the record producer Walter Legge for lunch. Both signed – an exception – Strebi’s visitors’ book together (see p. 21).

In 1954 there were disputes with the Swiss Festival Orchestra, whereupon the organising committee proceeded to book the Philharmonia Orchestra as a replacement. However, this engagement led to new complications: the London orchestra asked for two performances with Karajan – an exclusive right reserved for Furtwängler. According to the minutes of 15 February, Karajan “was not worried about being treated equally to Furtwängler, but he wished to perform two concerts with the orchestra close to him”. Now the turf battle spread to the committee. One side accused Karajan of shrewd tactics, warning against him and fearing that Furtwängler would be sacrificed. The other side argued that Furtwängler was a sick man, while Karajan owned the future. In the end, a diplomatic solution was found: Karajan was granted two concerts and one of Furtwängler’s concerts was scheduled twice, so that he had a total of three evenings.

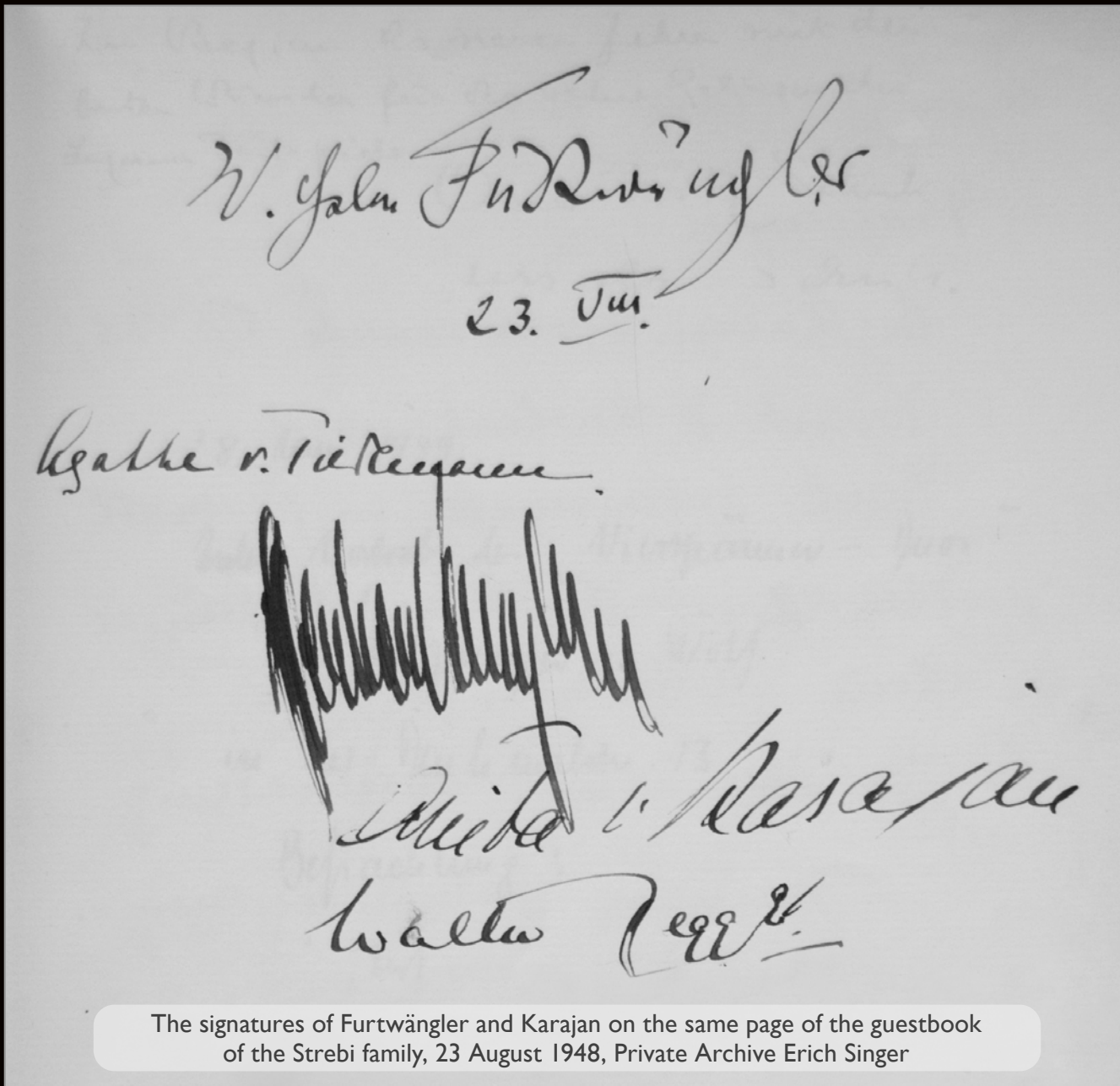
After Furtwängler’s death in November 1954, it was Karajan who was allowed to perform twice each year. As early as 1955, the *Basler Nachrichten* noted: “The two Karajan concerts are the most sought-after performances at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern.” This was to remain so until the maestro’s death. With the exception of the summer of 1960, he appeared in Lucerne every year. By now he usually appeared without soloists, and when he did not perform with his “Berliners”, he would share the stage with the Vienna Philharmonic or – on one occasion – with the Cleveland Orchestra. Karajan’s concerts attained cult status, his arrival resembled a state occasion: an appointee from the Bühler residence (a patron) would drive him from the hotel to the concert hall, flanked by a motorbike escort of policemen in gala uniforms, bringing all other traffic to a standstill. When Karajan protested, “we can’t do that in a country of democratic traditions”, he was appeased and his transfer from one side of the lake to the other accelerated, in one year even by speedboat.

Promoting young talent

Karajan nurtured young talent in Lucerne from an early stage. As early as 1952, he had suggested a conducting course, which was realised in 1955. The students were faced with an ad hoc orchestra of young international musicians, as Karajan was of the opinion that it was more efficient to work with an inexperienced orchestra than with an elite ensemble. Later on he also emphasised, and not only to me, that young conductors either did not get enough opportunities to conduct or that they were immediately placed in front of the star orchestras, not allowing them enough time to develop – unlike himself, who in Ulm in the 1930s had transformed a pitiful assembly of players into an orchestra who went on to achieve extraordinary successes. (In Berlin, Karajan once concluded a conducting course with the words: “Gentlemen, I wish you all a bad orchestra.”)

The Lucerne music critic Mario Gerteis recalled: “The rehearsals took place in the hall at the Lukaskirche. When the windows were open, one could hear Karajan’s instructions and corrections. He put in a lot of effort and stayed in Lucerne

Herbert von Karajan



The signatures of Furtwängler and Karajan on the same page of the guestbook of the Strebi family, 23 August 1948, Private Archive Erich Singer

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan, invited to Lucerne for the first time, rehearsing with the Swiss Festival Orchestra, 1948 © Lisa Meyerlist, Staatsarchiv Luzern FDC 102/2575

for around two weeks in order to teach the course. In the evenings he usually attended the concerts of his “rivals”. I was an usher at the door of the hall’s VIP seating area. As the evening’s conductor appeared on stage, the doors had to be closed. I had strict instructions not to let anyone into the hall after this point. Karajan, who was restless and always short of time, had the habit of only appearing at the last moment. Once he sprinted towards the door but didn’t make it in time: he was only a few metres away from me when I closed the door in his face, according to the rules. He had to stay outside for ten minutes and listen to an overture in the corridor.”

Later, instead of established international stars, Karajan occasionally engaged young talents as soloists, giving them a helping hand to launch their careers. A prime example of this was Anne-Sophie Mutter: her Lucerne debut in the “Young Artists” series became the talk of the town in 1976. The then 13-year-old violinist had been recommended to Karajan, who subsequently included her in the series – he was so impressed that he immediately booked her for the Whitsun Concerts in Salzburg in 1977 and also re-engaged her in Lucerne for the following year, when she performed Beethoven’s *Triple Concerto* alongside Yo-Yo Ma and Mark Zeltser.

Karajan and Modernism

As elsewhere, the core of Karajan’s programmes in Lucerne was the “classical” repertoire from Bach to Bruckner and Richard Strauss. Nevertheless, in August 1949, at his second appearance, he conducted Bohuslav Martinů’s *Concerto grosso* and thereafter also included “moderate” modernist works (Honegger, Martin, Ravel, Roussel and Stravinsky), although these performances met with little response from the Lucerne audience. Mario Gerteis reported that even a Karajan on the podium could not prevent the hall, in the summer of 1953, from being half empty for Stravinsky’s *Oedipus Rex* ...

In this context, an anecdote from later times comes to mind. When music from Poland was the festival’s focus in 1980, Karajan was prepared to conduct Krzysztof Penderecki’s *Polymorphia*. The evening began with a half hour delay due to a power failure, making it impossible for the orchestra to perform (Karajan: “Let’s start with the interval!”). When the lights finally came back on, there was a “stumbling block” in Karajan’s score: from my seat in the side gallery, with the maestro in my sight line, I noticed him, straight after the beginning, desperately trying to turn the pages of his score which seemed to be wedged into each other. Even wetting his fingers regularly did not help. The musicians looked at each other in bafflement and remained on the introductory cluster sound until the viola player Siegbert Ueberschaer (“I suddenly thought: Siegbert, here comes your big moment!”) gave a signal to continue and the forty-eight strings managed to bring the work to an end, albeit in a chaotic rendition. Later on, during the “real” interval, Karajan ruefully remarked backstage: “... and to think that even the orchestra’s librarian could conduct this piece”. To which one of the Philharmonic players jokingly replied: “And better ...”

Erich Singer

Translation: *Viola Scheffel*

Herbert von Karajan



Herbert von Karajan in Lucerne, competition, Herbert von Karajan also blows the horn, 1954 © Jean Schneider, Archive Lucerne Festival

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recordings (mono): © 1951 recording of Radio Basel at the Internationale Musikfestwochen Luzern.
Recording file stored at RTS Radio Télévision Suisse
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recording dates: August 16, 1952 (Beethoven, Op. 93 & Mozart)
August 10, 1955 (Bach & Honegger)
September 6, 1956 (Beethoven, Op. 68 & Brahms, Op. 98)
August 17, 1957 (Brahms, Op. 77)

recording location: Kunsthau, Lucerne
executive producer: Dipl.-Tonmeister Ludger Böckenhoff

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cover photo: Herbert von Karajan rehearsing with the Vienna Philharmonic, 1959

© Elfriede Hanak, Karajan-Archive 1058746

photos: Archive Lucerne Festival, Staatsarchiv Luzern, Stiftung Fotodokumentation Kanton Luzern (Fotodok)

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Herbert von Karajan

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As part of an internal alphorn competition of the Berlin Philharmonic, Elinor von Karajan hands over the instrument to her husband, 1963 © Paul Weber, Archive Lucerne Festival