



Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Concentus Musicus of Vienna
Beethoven Symphonies 4 & 5



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Nikolaus Harnoncourt's recordings of *Beethoven's Symphonies Nos. 4 and 5* with **Concentus Musicus of Vienna** are now available from Sony Classical. Harnoncourt, who died on March 5, 2016, founded the Concentus Musicus of Vienna in 1953, thus opening a new chapter in recent music history. Today there is no longer-established orchestra that plays period instruments.

However, in more than six decades of working together, the ensemble had never tackled Beethoven's nine symphonies. The Fourth and Fifth Symphonies were recorded live in May 2015 during two sold-out concerts at the Musikverein in Vienna.

For Harnoncourt these works were not new terrain, of course. The multiple award-winning conductor had previously laid down a milestone in the history of recorded music with a Beethoven cycle. In the early 1990s, with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, he recorded all the symphonies and the *Missa Solemnis*, as well as the solo concerti.

His Beethoven then had a new, arousing and modern sound. In this new recording with the Concentus, his approach changed.

"In the last few years, my view of Beethoven has changed radically again," confessed Harnoncourt. "The occasion for this was a production of Beethoven's sole opera, *Fidelio*, with the Concentus. The scales fell from my eyes, as it were, when I truly perceived for the first time how precisely Beethoven knew the instruments of his day and how exactly he was aware of what they can and cannot do."

This realization prompted Harnoncourt to take a new look at the symphonies, this time with the Concentus Musicus of Vienna. The new Beethoven therefore appears as the sum of all his experience, his observations and a hunger to interpret that remained unsatiated, whether in the introduction to the Fourth with passages of pale ghostliness and its wildly

dashing finale, or in the “great misunderstanding,” the opening movement of the Fifth, followed by a slow movement that is far from being a harmless idyll before the outbreak of joy in the concluding Allegro.

Ludwig van Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony with the famous opening motif in C minor is the composer’s “greatest hit” and potentially greatest misunderstanding. It has often been suggested that this motif represents destiny knocking on the door. Harnoncourt disagreed. “No, this symphony is about the uprising of the masses. In this sense, it is Beethoven’s most political symphony, more even than the Eroica,” he said. The work begins with the famously stern opening motif, but culminates after four movements in a radiant, jubilant major key – triumph over all darkness and danger, a victory anthem, an ode to freedom.

A definitive view of Beethoven? “There can be no end,” Harnoncourt modestly admitted, “because, ultimately, the very great works of art remain enigmatic.”

About Nikolas Harnoncourt:

Born in 1929 in Berlin, Nikolaus Harnoncourt was raised in Graz, Austria. In 1952 he was hired by Karajan as a cellist in the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, where he played until 1969. His intense interest in early music led to the founding of his own ensemble in 1953, which made its debut in 1954 under the baton of Paul Hindemith in Vienna’s Konzerthaus and from 1957 became world-renowned under the name of Concentus Musicus Wien.

Since the 1970s, Harnoncourt also conducted other orchestras and at opera houses, with close relationships to the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the opera houses of Zürich, the Vienna State Opera and the Theater an der Wien. In 1985 he founded the Styriarte music festival and since the early nineties he was an annual guest at the Salzburg Festival; he also taught at the Mozarteum in Salzburg from 1972 to 1992.

Harnoncourt received multiple awards for his works which included – in addition to countless concerts and recordings - pioneering writings such as "Music as sound speech" and "The musical dialogue" and received the Polar Music Prize in 1994, the Ernst-von-Siemens-Music Prize in 2002 and in 2005 the Kyoto Prize. In 2009 he was awarded the Gramophone Lifetime Achievement Award and 2014 the Echo Klassik for life time achievement.

With him, the music world lost not only one of the most important conductors of recent decades, but also an undeviating, constantly questioning, and humorous champion for music.

Sony Classical is grateful to have accompanied Nikolaus Harnoncourt on his artistic journey since 2002 and implemented many projects, including Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s "Instrumental oratorio" with the symphonies Nos. 39, 40, and 41, and these recordings of Ludwig van Beethoven’s Fourth and Fifth Symphonies.

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