

# George Zukerman - Biography

*Celebrated world-wide as the "High Priest of the bassoon"*

Solo bassoonist, George Zukerman is one of the few artists in the world to achieve recognition on his instrument outside the ranks of the Symphony Orchestra. He has been praised by critics around the world and is acknowledged, both in recital and with orchestra as a leading exponent of the solo repertoire for the instrument and an ardent spokesman for the standing of the bassoon as a recognized solo instrument. The sobriquet "High Priest" was bestowed at opposite ends of the music world, following recent concerts in New Zealand and Newfoundland.

In over four decades of international touring this Canadian virtuoso has established a significant career and racked up 40 world tours, including 7 to the former Soviet Union and numerous return tours to Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and China. In each of these countries he achieved the distinction of being the first bassoon soloist ever invited to tour with their national symphony orchestras or in recital.



Recognized as one of Canada's leading wind virtuosi, Zukerman is arguably among the world's most widely traveled solo artists. Apart from countless appearances at home in Canada and the USA he has performed and recorded over the years in most of the world's major musical centres, including Rome, Paris, Amsterdam, Milan, Belgrade, Prague, Madrid, Dublin, Reykjavik, Oslo, Copenhagen, Lisbon, Jerusalem, New Delhi, Singapore, Bangkok, London, Glasgow, Moscow, Berlin, Tokyo, Shanghai, Beijing, Johannesburg, Capetown, Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, Wellington, Auckland.

He has recorded the major concerto repertoire for the bassoon for the Vox-Turnabout label with the renowned Wurtemberg Chamber Orchestra. His European best-seller recording of Mozart, Weber and Stamitz concertos was reissued in 2003 in a special digitally re-mastered edition of "Bassoon Concerto Classics".

As one of Canada's best known musical raconteurs, Zukerman often interlaces music with spoken programme annotation, fascinating background, casual commentary and anecdotes of touring life. His concert-lectures are keenly anticipated by musicians and non musicians alike for his superb musicianship and for his ready wit and humour - commodities often sadly lacking on the conventional concert stage. His "Zukermania!!" programme is as verbally entertaining as it is musically fascinating. His programmes always feature a wide variety of repertoire, ranging from baroque works (written for the three key version of the complex present-day bassoon) to compositions created especially for Zukerman, by composers from around the world.

While Zukerman's demanding international touring itinerary takes him to the world's music centres for major concert appearances, he also has a penchant for turning up and performing at some of the world's most exotic locations. He has given bassoon recitals in Banda Seri Begawan, Brunei; Suva and Lautoka, Fiji; Mauritius, Lilongwe and Zomba in Malawi; Sitka, Alaska; Papeete, Tahiti; Tuktoyaktuk, NWT (home in Canada!) and even Kabul, Afghanistan (audience 300 plus 2 camels.)

Critics have also referred to Mr. Zukerman as "Master of the bassoon" (Durban); "The Pablo Casals of the bassoon" (Singapore); "The Heifetz of the bassoon" [Perth] "The Great Magician of the bassoon" (Munich). Hong Kong declared, "Everything glorious a bassoon can do!" and the American Record Guide (New York) said of his early recording of the Mozart concerto, "He is, on the showing of this record, one of the leading bassoon soloists of the world. The Mozart is played superlatively, with the most beautiful tone and phrasing...a devastating display of bassoon playing."

Unlike the piano, the violin or even the 'cello, the bassoon is not yet among the ranks of the most popular of solo instruments. Yet through his extensive appearances and indefatigable touring Mr. Zukerman has - often

single-handedly, - helped to elevate his "symphonic piece of plumbing" from its penal servitude in the back ranks of the orchestra to a place of honour as a soloist in the musical major leagues.

In research over the past thirty years, he has located over 150 concerti for the instrument, several of which he is now in the process of editing for publication and further recording. In addition, there is a vast repertoire of ensemble works for bassoon including nearly 200 works from the 18th century for bassoon and string trio or quartet. Among more recent works written for and dedicated to Mr. Zukerman are compositions by Canadians Jacques Hetu, Murray Adaskin, John Weinzweig, Jean Coulthard, Theo Goldberg, Elliot Weisgarber, Robert Turner, Arthur Polson and Imant Raminsh.



In Mozart year, 1991, Zukerman created the Great Mozart Hunt, "a dramatized concert in two acts" depicting the centuries old hunt for three allegedly missing Mozart bassoon concertos. Accompanied by a small chamber orchestra, Zukerman is also joined by veteran Canadian actor, Ron Halder who plays the parts of Mozart, Salieri, Koechel, Brietkopf [and also Hertel] the Impresario and a Private Eye. In a sometimes hilarious evening of music and theatre, audiences hear some true Mozart [the glorious youthful bassoon concerto, K 191] some spurious Mozart [works that were claimed as Mozart, but probably aren't] and some truly anonymous works [including a Concerto in F Major] - that may, or then again may not be from the pen of Wolfgang Amadeus. Will the real W.A. Mozart please stand up?

In recent seasons Mr. Zukerman has embarked on a special project to present school concert demonstrations in Canada's remotest areas including the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, Nunavik and the Yukon. In a series of tours which included appearances in settlements with such splendid names as Qikiqtarjuaq, Kuujaarapik and Kangisualajuaq, he has performed in more than 250 schools and for virtually every child in the North who wasn't home sick in bed with the flu! On return from a recent tour he was overheard commenting that in some communities performers were not permitted to land until they could properly pronounce the village names!

After numerous tours in Canada and the USA in commemoration of the Mozart bi-centenary, the GREAT MOZART HUNT has appeared overseas in Australia, Ireland and South Africa, and is still frequently re-mounted with regional and community Symphony Orchestras.

More recently, Mr. Zukerman participated in the development of a new series of lectures in conjunction with the School of Music and the University of British Columbia. Based on a practical application of a life-time of concertizing, the lectures were part of a new University "Music for Living" curriculum, and were designed to give young music students a practical insight into self promotion, and development of alternate careers for musical fulfillment.

For many years, parallel to his performing career, Mr. Zukerman maintained an active profile as one of Canada's leading Impresarios. He specialized in community organization, particularly for remote and isolated venues. He is a past Chairman of the Canadian Association of Artists' Managers and a past Board Member of CAPACOA [Canadian Association of Arts Presenting Organizations].

Born in Great Britain, Mr. Zukerman has lived in Canada since 1953. Prior to settling in Canada, where he now lives in the Vancouver suburb of White Rock / Surrey, he was a member of the world-renowned Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel Aviv. From 1953 to 1965 he was a member of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and the distinguished CBC Chamber Orchestra.

Mr. Zukerman was recently awarded the Order of Canada (Canada's Highest honour) and the Order of British Columbia, for his contribution to touring in Canada and abroad. He was also recipient of the 1996 National Arts Centre "Award for Distinguished Contribution to Touring".