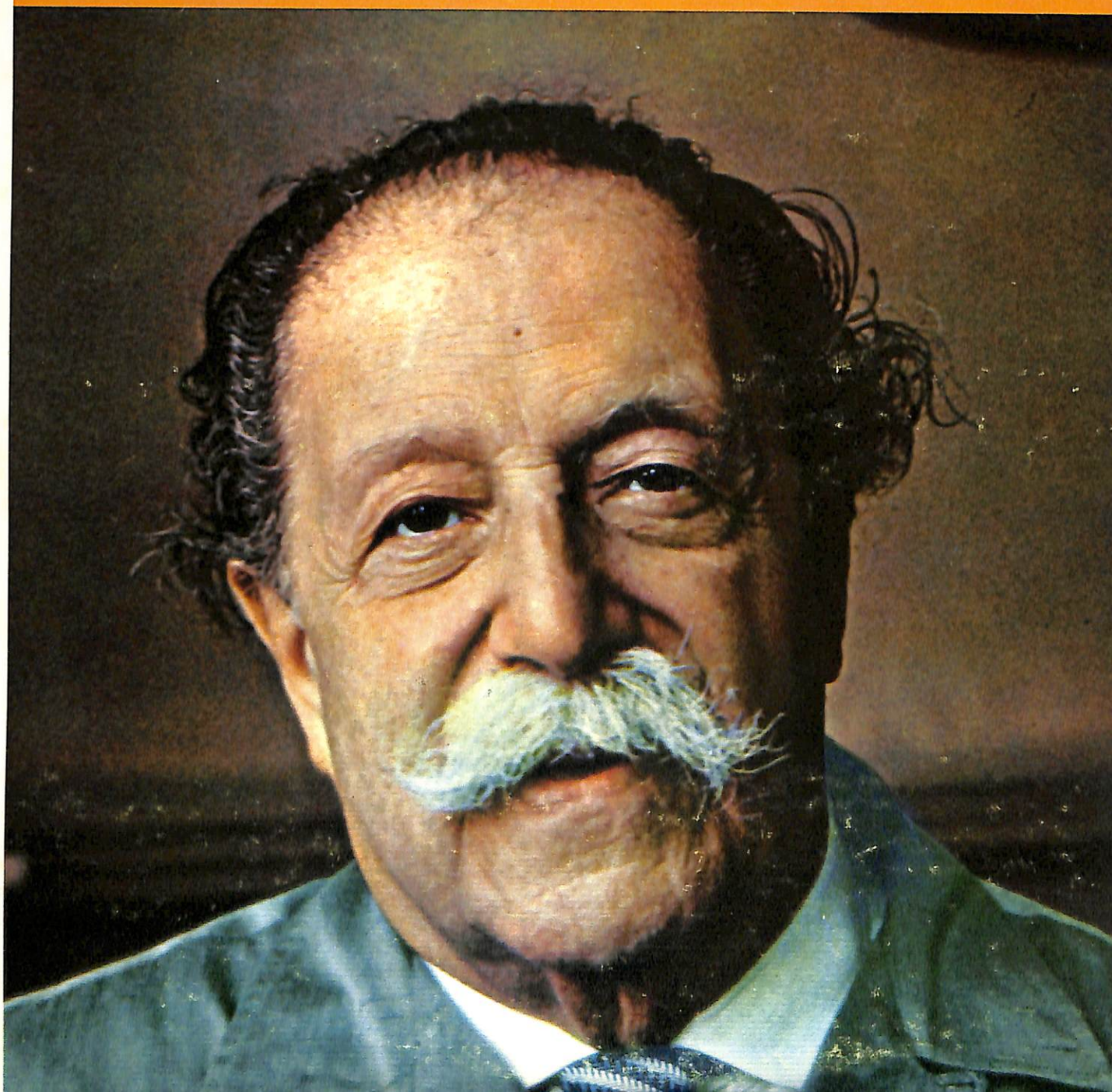


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PIERRE MONTEUX
London Symphony Orchestra
JOHANNES BRAHMS
Symphony No.2 in D major
Academic Festival Overture



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JOHANNES BRAHMS

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 73

Academic Festival Overture, Opus 80

PIERRE MONTEUX
conducting the
London Symphony Orchestra

Brahms's "Pastoral" symphony

MELLOW ORCHESTRAL VISTAS, tritonesque horn-calls heard through string harmonies of muted, twilight color, the intermittent wink and glow of woodwinds: the "half-images," these, of a symphony where even a frequent jarring contest of brass, a rhetorical gesture from the strings, or cool chatter from flutes lacking a sense of occasion never impedes the grand, easy revelation of power. It is called, perhaps rightly, Brahms's "Pastoral." But where Beethoven, in his sixth symphony, issues into a world of clear brooks, bright sunshine, and pantomime storms, the land of Brahms flows with milk, honey, and mystery. As in the violin concerto and the G major violin sonata, both conceived and partly written in the same serene Carinthian countryside, the legends pass in slow review on billowing rhythms and in rolling contrapuntal perspectives.

The modeling is restrained, firm, and utterly secure. Brahms took something close to two decades to produce the expected first symphony, but even there—as in the exploratory *Variations on a Theme of Haydn*—the touch has benefited from much unpublished practice. Only a year later, the second appeared; and after the Herculean striving of the first, it seemed like Bacchus in repose.

First movement. The bass phrase which sets things in motion at once underpins what transpires to be the movement's chief material—a lyrical theme here treated by horn and woodwind—but it is no casual harmony; as the music proceeds, it takes on an increasing number of tasks. In fact, the violins, which now assume control from the winds, adopt it, expand it, and then pass it to the lower strings. The sequence ends in a distant drum-roll and misty chords on the trombones. Then the violins enter again with a fully developed version of the opening bass phrase, a climax shortly ensues, and modulations prepare for the appearance of the second subject: a waltz theme on the lower strings in F sharp minor. From here there is a move to A major (the orthodox dominant) by way of a leaping, strongly-accented theme and soon the second subject makes a brief reappearance with eloquent flute decoration.

A powerful development follows, centered almost exclusively on the first subject. Fugal treatment and deft rhythmic manipulation create rich patterns frequently broken by colliding brass and angry *tutti* statements; but

the recapitulation slips in quietly on the oboe, after a long descent on flute and clarinet. The themes are now paraded again, much enriched, and move into a coda dominated by a horn solo of rapturous beauty. The movement closes with hushed string meditations on the first subject.

Second movement. A prolonged theme in the violins, at once majestic and consolatory, enters at processional gait. In time, parts of it are requisitioned by the horn which turns them ponderously over with woodwind help. Modulations, however, and the entry of new instruments, soon encourage the return of the violins, who put their case more urgently and pass on to some bright climaxes. A distinctly new tune is shortly heard in a warm, lower register: its fate is to be torn into long, fugato streamers. The whole movement halts tensely. A statement of the first theme from the violins accomplishes nothing and it is finally left to the oboe to infiltrate—carrying the first theme in E major. Successively, by chromatic sleight-of-hand, violins, clarinets, and flutes then pivot the music through to B major in a bar and a half; and from here on, the movement is a grand progress of passionate declamations and heraldic brass climaxes, with the shattered second subject making one ghostly reappearance.

Third movement. Brahms uses a reduced orchestra here and the mood is correspondingly miniature and intimate. The principal texture is created by strings and woodwind almost exclusively; only horns add an occasional tint of gold. Its leading theme is a fragile woodwind tune, with the pace of a minuet and the mood of a summer afternoon. But breezes shortly blow up in the strings and the wind instruments are hustled into an activity which culminates in an emphatic, shouted chorus. Then the first theme regains control, leading to a brief but solemn episode whose duties show themselves to be the re-introduction of the second section. Before this has progressed far, however, the woodwinds once again suggest the original dainty tempo and we are back again in the placid, post-meridian idyll, with wind and strings joining to swing the harmonies from F sharp to the movement's tonic key.

Fourth movement. A theme with a pronounced Beethovenian roll is heard first *sotto voce* on the strings. Even then its good cheer and agility promise an onslaught and this duly arrives in a version for full orchestra, delivered

with minimum preamble. The recession of this chorus exposes the woodwinds, clowning drunkenly; their embarrassment is covered by the main contrasting tune, a *largamente* violin and viola theme, which continues to feel the pace of the tempos so far released. Accretions to this theme feature a reference to the first subject, accompanied now by a triumphant falling figure in the brass and a section marked *Tranquillo* in which woodwinds and strings move through triplet figures.

By and large the development lengthens the shadows over this scenery. Remote, silvery events take shape on the horizon, but the occasional outburst and a more or less constant pressure to head for daylight make the D major tonic a continuous goal. Soon this appears, the material follows regularly, and then the trombones step grandly in to usher the music towards a coda of overwhelming brilliance.

Some two years after he composed his second symphony, Brahms was awarded an honorary degree, Doctor of Philosophy, by the University of Breslau. The citation referred to him as "viro illustrissimo.... artis musicae severioris in Germania nunc principi," meaning roughly: "To a most illustrious man.... Germany's leader in the intellectual art of musical composition." Whether the word "severioris," which carries rather heavy, academic overtones in the Latin language, roused Brahms's sense of fun we shall never know, but it is certainly typical of his burly irreverence—based largely on a natural shyness—that having been honored by the professors he should celebrate with the students.

Breslau's expected musical present, when it did come, was no grim exercise in counterpoint and no pale lip-service to the gods of intellect. It was, instead, an entirely cheerful and homespun fantasy on student songs, which Brahms obviously thoroughly enjoyed writing, every musician enjoys playing, and no listener can avoid liking.

The basis for the opulent offering Brahms makes is four well-known songs, "Wir haben gebauet ein stattliches Haus," "Landesvater," "Fuchsenritt," and the solemn "Gaudeamus igitur" whose majestic strains make a fitting climax. The overture was first performed at Breslau, by the Breslau Orchestral Society, on January 4, 1881, the composer conducting.

A venerable figure in a new post

THE LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, one of London's four main orchestras, was founded in 1904 by a group of musicians who broke away from the now defunct Queen's Hall Orchestra after a disagreement with the conductor, Sir Henry Wood. Through the years it has performed for a variety of world-famous conductors, and at present, with Pierre Monteux as its principal director, it has reached a high peak of excellence.

The name of Pierre Monteux scarcely needs any gen-

eral introduction. He was born at a time when Brahms, Wagner, and Verdi were living composers at the height of their fame, was conducting by the time he was twelve, and has lived to see, and share in, a musical revolution. One of his most prominent roles, in earlier years, was that of principal conductor with Serge Diaghilev's Ballet Russe; with this, he conducted the premières of Ravel's *Daphnis and Chloë*, Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, *Rossignol*, and *Petrouchka*.

Since then, Monteux's work in Europe and America (where he has been permanent conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra) has gained him a reputation not only as a consummate musician and conductor, but also as one of the keenest and most progressive minds in the world of art. At the age of eighty-seven, he is still the doyen of the *avant-garde*. He took up his present post as chief conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra in December of 1961.

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