

VICS-1055 STEREO

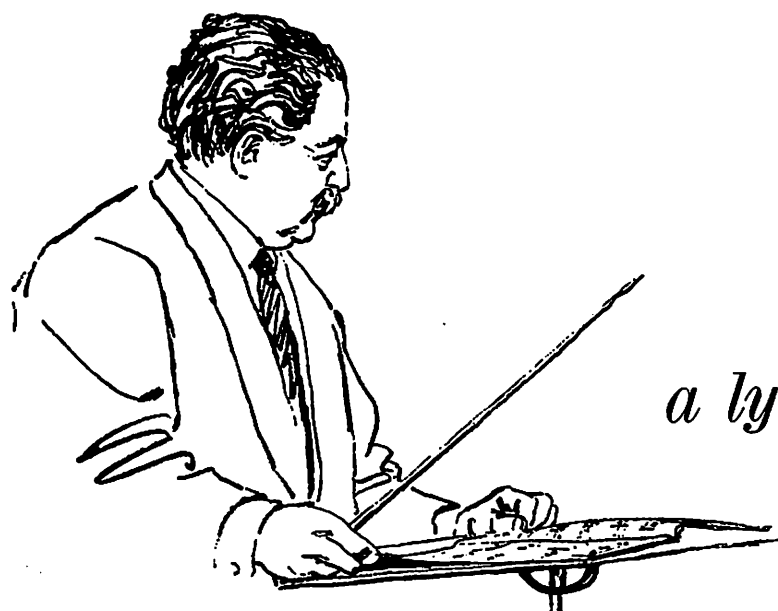


*Brahms*  
SYMPHONY No. 2  
MONTEUX/VIENNA PHILHARMONIC



Guardi—A Public Place in Front of a Palace





*a lyric masterpiece*

**F**or Brahms, writing a symphony after Beethoven was "no laughing matter." As far back as 1855, after hearing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony for the first time, he began a symphony in the same key of D Minor, but gave it up as a bad job. By 1863 he had embarked on another symphony project which materialized after nearly fifteen years of intermittent toil as the great work in C Minor. Once he had gotten a complete symphony out of his system, successive essays in the form seemed to come easier: for in 1877, just one year after the completion of the First Symphony, Brahms introduced its lyric companion piece in the key of D.

#### First reaction to the symphony

The critic Eduard Hanslick gives perhaps the most interesting and informative first reaction to the D Major Symphony. "The novelty was a great, unqualified success. Seldom has there been such a cordial public expression of pleasure in a new composition. . . . The character of this symphony may be described in short as peaceful, tender, but not effeminate; serenity, which on the one side is quickened to joyous humor and on the other to meditative seriousness. The first movement . . . has something of the character of the serenade, and

this impression is strengthened still further in the scherzo and finale. . . . A broad, singing Adagio follows, which, it appears to me, is more conspicuous for the development of the themes than for the worth of the themes themselves. For this reason, undoubtedly, it makes a less profound impression on the public than do the other movements. The scherzo is thoroughly delightful. . . . The finale, more vivacious, but always agreeable in its golden serenity, is widely removed from the stormy finales of the modern school. Mozartian blood flows in its veins."

The eminent Dr. Hanslick's remarks not only describe the sunnier aspects of Brahms' symphony but also reveal indirectly the musical tastes of the Vienna Philharmonic audiences. The magnificent, stormy development in the first movement and the strange, austere tone color that grows out of a momentary figure for trombones and horns comes in for no mention whatever. As for the wonderful slow movement, its melancholy autumnal song seems to have been as much of a sticking point for Hanslick as it has been for many another listener since. But there can be no doubt that after repeated hearings, this is the part of Brahms' D Major Symphony that emerges as its crowning glory, despite

the lyric beauties of the opening movement, the charm of the scherzo and the unalloyed joy and golden brilliance of the finale.

Notes by DAVID HALL

Mr. Hall is a contributing editor of HiFi/Stereo Review, and co-author of The Disc Book.

#### PIERRE MONTEUX

This celebrated conductor is one of the most famous and beloved figures in the entire musical world. Dean of living conductors, he has led virtually every great symphony orchestra both here and abroad. He began his podium career in 1911 as conductor of Diaghileff's Ballet Russe, and he made music history directing several world premières, including that of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. Monteux's first visit to the United States, 1916-24, included two seasons with the Metropolitan Opera and five years with the Boston Symphony. After a decade of activity in Europe, Monteux returned to America as conductor of the San Francisco Symphony. In 1952 he resigned to devote his time to guest conducting; however, in 1961, at the age of eighty-six, he accepted the directorship of the London Symphony.

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