

LM
1173 *Brahms* SYMPHONY No. 2, IN D, Op. 73



RCA VICTOR
Red Seal Records



BRAHMS • SYMPHONY No. 2 in D, op. 73
San Francisco Symphony Orchestra • Pierre Monteux, Conductor

Form 25-9438

Printed in U. S. A.

LONG **33 $\frac{1}{3}$** PLAY

Brahms SYMPHONY No. 2, IN D, Op. 73

For 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 on a symphony in the same key of D minor, but gave it up as a bad job. The first two movements were incorporated a few years later as part of the First Piano Concerto in D Minor, while the third became the mighty dirge for the German Requiem, *Behold all flesh as is the grass*. By 1862 he had embarked on another symphony project which was destined to materialize after nearly fifteen years of intermittent toil as the great work in C Minor . . . first work of its kind that could truly be said to match the heroic utterance of Beethoven.

Once having gotten a full-blown symphony out of his system, successive essays in the form seemed to come easier; for in 1877, just one year after completion of the First Symphony, Brahms introduced its lyric companion piece in the key of D. A few days before the announced date of December 11, 1877, for the public première, Brahms and his friend, Ignaz Brüll, played through the score of the D Major Symphony on two pianos before a group of invited guests. As it was, unforeseen circumstances forced postponement of the orchestral performance until December 30 when Hans Richter conducted the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Brahms himself conducted the second performance of the music at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on January 10, 1878. The late English composer, Ethel Smyth, was present at that concert and remarks in her memoirs, *Impressions That Remained* (Alfred Knopf, N. Y.), that the composer's interpretation was not very convincing.

For all the seriousness with which he approached the actual creation of music, Brahms indulged in a good bit of perverse jesting when it came to discussing work in progress with his friends. That was his way with things that were close and dear to him. Of the Second Symphony he wrote such things as, "I do not know whether I have a pretty symphony; I must inquire of skilled persons." To another friend he writes, "The orchestra here plays my new symphony with crepe bands on their sleeves, because of its dirgelike effect. It is to be printed with a black edge too." Then later he confides, "It is really no

San Francisco
Symphony Orchestra
•
Pierre Monteux
Conductor

symphony but really a *Sinfonie*, and I shall have no need to play it to you beforehand. You merely sit down at the piano, put your little feet on the two pedals in turn, and strike the chord of F minor several times in succession, first in the treble, then in the bass *ff* and *pp* and you will gradually gain a vivid impression of my latest." To Dr. Schübring he described the new symphony as "a quite innocent, gay little one. Expect nothing, and for a month before, drum nothing but Berlioz, Liszt, and Wagner; then its tender amiability will do you a lot of good."

This last was about as close as Brahms ever came to giving an accurate advance account of the new work. The composer's chief spokesman in Vienna, Eduard Hanslick, gives perhaps the most interesting and informative first reaction to the D Major Symphony as it was heard in that city. "The character of this symphony," he says, "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 begins immediately with a mellow and dusky horn theme. It has something of the character of the serenade, and this impression is strengthened still further in the *scherzo* and *finale*. This first movement, an *Allegro moderato*, in 3-4, immerses us in a clear wave of melody, upon which we rest, swayed, refreshed by two slight Mendelssohnian reminiscences which emerge before us. The last fifty measures of this movement expire in flashes of new melodic beauty. A broad, singing *Adagio* in B follows, which, as 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 in its graceful movement in minuet tempo. It is twice interrupted by a *Presto* in 2-4, which flashes, sparklike, for a moment. The *finale* in D, 4-4, more vivacious, but always agreeable in its golden sincerity, is widely removed from the stormy *finales* of the modern school. Mozartian blood flows in its veins."

The eminent Dr. Hanslick's remarks are informative in more ways than one; for besides describing in vivid fashion the sunnier aspects of Brahms' symphony, he lets us know 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 hearing over a period of years, this is the part of Brahms' D Major Symphony that emerges as its crowning glory, despite the lyric beauties of the opening movement, and the charm of the *scherzo* and the unalloyed joy and golden brilliance of the *finale*.

Notes by DAVID HALL

SIDE 1

BAND 1 — First Movement: *Allegro non troppo*
BAND 2 — Second Movement: *Adagio non troppo*

SIDE 2

BAND 1 — Third Movement: *Allegretto grazioso*
BAND 2 — Fourth Movement: *Allegro con spirito*

Mr. Monteux and the San Francisco Symphony can also be heard in two Beethoven Symphonies: *No. 2, in D, Op. 36* (LM-1024), and *No. 8, in F, Op. 93* (LM-43); also Franck's *Symphony in D Minor* (LM-1065).