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Bruno Walter

conducts Brahms Symphonies 1-4

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Along with Mozart, Beethoven and Mahler, Brahms was one of the cornerstones of Bruno Walter's repertoire. Yet it was not until 1934, twelve years into his recording career, that Walter made his first Brahms discs. The Fourth Symphony was recorded when Walter was guest conducting in London, in a long session that also included Beethoven's *Fidelio* Overture and Mozart's Symphony No. 39. Two years would pass before Walter would record his next Brahms, the Third Symphony, this time with "his" Vienna Philharmonic. The following year would see the recording of both the First Symphony and the *Academic Festival* Overture, again in Vienna.

It is likely that Walter would have gone on to record the Second in Vienna in 1938, had it not been for Hitler's *Anschluss*, which drove him out of Austria and into France, where he took up residence. Although he continued to record for EMI in both Paris and London before the outbreak of the War, the company did not take the opportunity to complete his Brahms cycle. By the time he moved to America and began conducting the New York Philharmonic regularly, their label, American Columbia, had already recorded a Brahms Second in 1940 under their music director, John Barbirolli, and were to record another with his successor, Artur Rodzinski, in 1946. It would not be until 1953 that Walter finally got to record the Second as part of a complete Brahms symphony cycle on LP.

The present release brings together Walter's three pre-war commercial recordings and completes the cycle with his earliest extant broadcast of the Second. The Walter we hear in these performances is not the avuncular, *Gemütlich* elder statesman one associates with his final stereo recordings. This Walter is volatile, even volcanic. One hears the fiery conclusion of his Brahms Second with the NBC, and assumes the high intensity is due to working with Toscanini's orchestra; but then one hears the Third from Vienna or the Fourth from London, and it is the same story. Only in the First does he seem more subdued, even compared to his later self.

A word about the original recordings is in order. It is interesting to note that the Third Symphony has Columbia matrix prefixes at a time when EMI artists like Walter and Beecham were recording simultaneously for both that label and HMV, with some recordings being issued on both imprints in different parts of the world. Both this and the First Symphony have been pitched at A=445 Hz in accordance with the tuning that the Vienna Philharmonic was reported to have used at the time. (The British and American recordings have been pitched at the "standard" A=440 Hz.)

In the Fourth Symphony, each movement was recorded continuously with overlapped fade-downs at the ends of sides and fade-ups at the beginnings of the following sides, in the same manner that RCA was recording Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra at the time. For the broadcast of the Second Symphony, I have added a small amount of digital reverberation to counter the excessively dry acoustics of Studio 8-H, whose lack of resonance seemed to me to draw attention to itself and away from the performance.

The sources for the transfers of the commercial recordings were American Victor pressings, the quietest sources on which the recordings were issued worldwide.

Mark Obert-Thorn

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walter

conducts his first symphony cycle

brahms symphonies 1-4

vienna philharmonic orchestra
nbc symphony orchestra
bbc symphony orchestra

Obert-Thorn

studio & live recordings, 1934 - 1940

bruno walter
complete brahms

CD 1 BRAHMS Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 68

- 1 1st mvt. - Un poco sostenuto - Allegro (13:07)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Andante sostenuto (9:05)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Un poco allegretto e grazioso (4:31)
- 4 4th mvt. - Adagio - Allegro non troppo ma con brio (15:11)

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Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Bruno Walter

Symphony No. 1
Recorded 3rd and 4th May 1937 in the
Musikvereinsaal, Vienna

Symphony No. 2
From the broadcast of 17th February
1940 in NBC Studio B-H, New York City

Symphony No. 3
Recorded 18th and 19th May 1936 in the
Musikvereinsaal, Vienna

Symphony No. 4
Recorded 21st May 1934 in EMI Abbey
Road Studio No. 1, London

BRAHMS Symphony No. 3 in F major, Op. 90

- 5 1st mvt. - Allegro con brio - Un poco sostenuto - Tempo I (8:49)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Andante (7:28)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Poco allegretto (5:35)
- 8 4th mvt. - Allegro - Un poco sostenuto (7:54)

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

CD 2 BRAHMS Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

- 1 1st mvt. - Allegro non troppo (14:19)
- 2 2nd mvt. - Adagio non troppo (10:26)
- 3 3rd mvt. - Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino) (5:11)
- 4 4th mvt. - Allegro con spirito (8:54)

NBC Symphony Orchestra

Full discographic information
is available online

BRAHMS Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

- 5 1st mvt. - Allegro non troppo (11:56)
- 6 2nd mvt. - Andante moderato (12:06)
- 7 3rd mvt. - Allegro giocoso (5:36)
- 8 4th mvt. - Allegro energico e passionato (10:08)

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Total duration: 2hr 30:15

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Bruno Walter, conductor

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