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BRAHMS:

SYMPHONY No. 2 IN D, Op.73

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

CONDUCTED BY BRUNO WALTER

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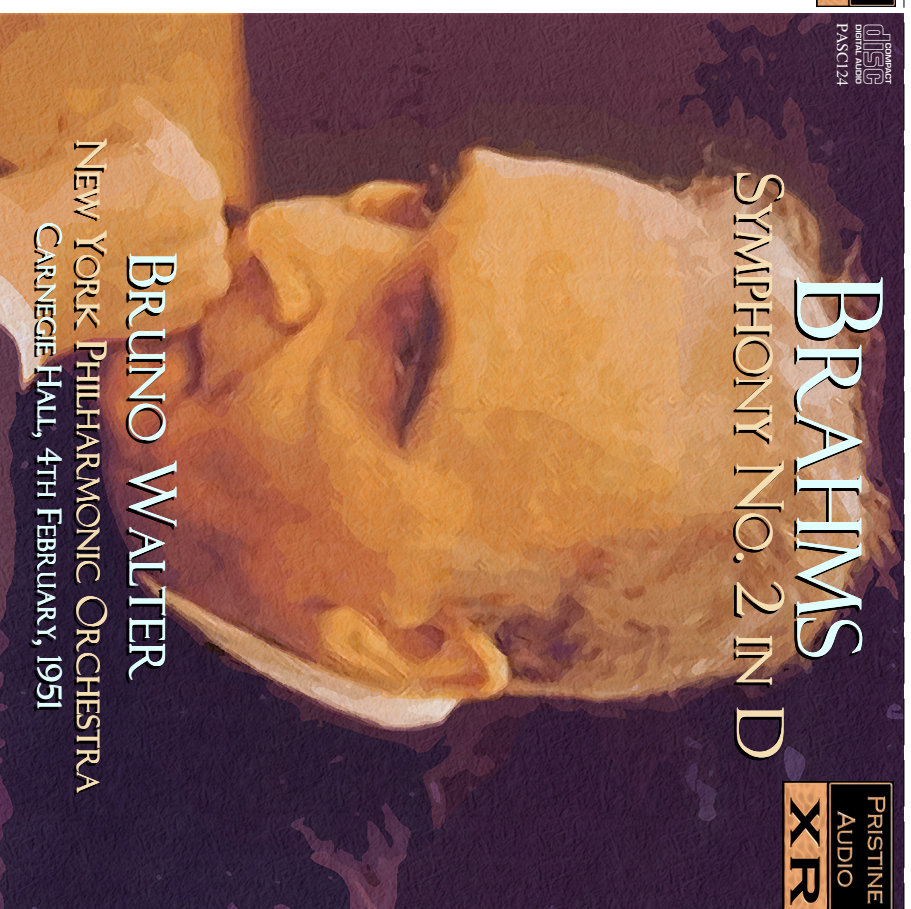
BRAHMS
SYMPHONY No. 2 IN D

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|---|--------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | 1st mvt. - Allegro non troppo | 14:56 |
| 2 | 2nd mvt. - Adagio non troppo | 10:48 |
| 3 | 3rd mvt. - Allegretto grazioso | 5:20 |
| 4 | 4th mvt. - Allegro con spirito | 8:57 |

Live broadcast concert at Carnegie Hall, 4th February 1951
This transfer remastered from a BBC re-broadcast transmission, 25th December 1977.
Transfer and XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, September 2008
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BRAHMS: SYMPHONY No. 2

WALTER, NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

The Symphony No. 2 in D, Op. 73 was composed by Johannes Brahms in the summer of 1877 during a visit to the Austrian Alps. Its gestation was brief in comparison with the fifteen years which Brahms took to complete his First Symphony. The symphony is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, and strings.

The cheerfulness of the Symphony has been likened with the pastoral mood of Ludwig van Beethoven's Sixth Symphony. In contrast, Brahms' First Symphony was marked by its sombre tonality (C minor).

The composer had written to his publisher (November 22, 1877) that the forthcoming symphony would be music of melancholy, that indeed the score must come out in mourning. And while the work is neither tragic nor especially dramatic, the mood of the first two movements, largely quiet or contemplative and reaching climaxes in the minor, suggests that this letter may not have been entirely a creation of wit. The last two movements are lighter in mood but also much briefer. The subtle interplay of contrasting melodies overlapping and being passed around throughout the instruments of the orchestra allow the conductor to dictate the mood by emphasizing different parts.

The premiere was given on December 30, 1877 in Vienna under the direction of Hans Richter. A typical performance lasts between 40 and 50 minutes.

In the Second Symphony, Brahms preserved the structural principles of the Classical symphony, in which two lively outer movements frame a slow second movement followed by a short scherzo:

I. *Allegro non troppo*

The cellos and double-basses start off the symphony on a tranquil note before the horns gently announce the main theme. The woodwind instruments develop the section and other instruments join in gradually progressing into a full-bodied forte (bar 58). A new theme is introduced in bar 82 in F-sharp minor. After bar 182, the exposition may be repeated from the beginning depending on the conductor and orchestra. After the development section (see sonata form), the second subject is repeated again in bar 370. Towards the conclusion of the first movement, Brahms marked bar 497 as "in tempo, sempre tranquillo", and it is this mood which pervades the remainder of the movement as it closes in the home key of D major.

II. *Adagio non troppo*

A brooding subject is introduced by the cellos from bars 1 to 12 alongside the bassoons and double basses. Brahms inserted a new tempo in bar 33 marked "L'istesso tempo, ma grazioso". Here, the dark and sombre mood of the piece continues until the end of the movement.

III. *Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino)*

Pizzicato cello provides the backdrop at the beginning but the oboe carries the main melody. A contrasting second subject marked "Presto ma non assai" begins with the string instruments and the full orchestra develops the theme. Bar 107 returns to the main tempo and gentle mood but the idyll setting is again disrupted in bar 126 when the earlier Presto marking makes a re-entry. Brahms yet again diverts the piece back into its principal tempo (bar 194) and thereafter to its peaceful close.

IV. *Allegro con spirito*

Busy-sounding (but quiet) strings begin the final movement. A loud section breaks in unexpectedly in bar 23 with the full orchestra. As the excitement appears to fade away, violins introduce a new subject in A major marked "largamente" (to be played broadly). The wind instruments would repeat this and develops into the other instruments as well. Bar 155 of the movement repeats the symphony's first subject again but instead of the joyful outburst heard earlier, Brahms introduced the movement's development section. A mid-movement "tranquillo" section (bar 206) elaborates earlier material. The first theme comes in again (bar 244) and the familiar orchestral forte is played. This time, instead of the A major theme in the "largamente" marking, Brahms allows the theme to be reprised in the symphony's home key of D major. Towards the end of the symphony, descending chords and a mazy run of notes by various instruments of the orchestra (bars 395 to 412) sound out the familiar A major theme again but this time drowned out in a blaze of brass instruments as the symphony ends on a triumphant note by the full orchestra complete with a timpani roll.

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