

BRAHMS

SYMPHONY NO. 2

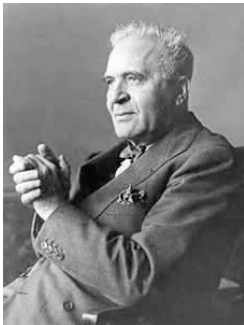


BRUNO WALTER
COLUMBIA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Mastered in DSD256

Bruno Walter (born Bruno Schlessinger, September 15, 1876 – February 17, 1962) was a German-born conductor, pianist, and composer. Born in Berlin, he left Germany in 1933 to escape the Third Reich, settling finally in the United States in 1939. He worked closely with Gustav Mahler, whose music he helped establish in the repertory, held major positions with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Salzburg Festival, Vienna State Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Staatsoper Unter den Linden and Deutsche Oper Berlin, among others, made recordings of historical and artistic significance, and is widely considered one of the great conductors of the 20th century.



Born near Alexanderplatz in Berlin to a middle-class Jewish family, he began his musical education at the Stern Conservatory at the age of eight, making his first public appearance as a pianist when he was nine; he performed a concerto movement with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1889 and a full concerto with them in February, 1890. He studied composition at Stern with Robert Radeke de:Robert Radecke, and remained active as a composer until about 1910 (see list of compositions below). But it was seeing an 1889 concert by the Berlin Philharmonic led by Hans von Bülow, he wrote, that "decided my future. Now I knew what I was meant for. No musical activity but that of an orchestral conductor could any longer be considered by me. He made his conducting début at the Cologne Opera with Albert Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied* in 1894. Later that year he left for the Hamburg Opera to work as a chorus director. There he first met and worked with Gustav Mahler, whom he revered and with whose music he later became strongly identified

Conducting In 1896, he was appointed Kapellmeister of the Stadttheater (municipal opera) in Breslau, on the strength of a recommendation from Mahler to the theater's director, Theodor Löwe. However, Löwe required that before taking up this position the young conductor change his last name from Schlessinger, which literally means Silesian, "because of its frequent occurrence in the capital of Silesia", in a letter to his brother paraphrased by Erik Rydning and Rebecca Pechefsky, Walter said he had "suggested several names, which Mahler wrote down and gave to Löwe, who returned the contract with the name Bruno Walter. These biographers add that Walter wrote to his parents that he found that "having to change his name was terrible,"; they report that Mahler and his sisters "pressed" Walter to make the change of name, and add that, contrary to occasional unsubstantiated reports, it "is unknown" whether Löwe's stipulation had anything to do with a desire to conceal Walter's Jewish origins.

In 1897, Walter became Chief Conductor at the municipal opera in Pressburg. He found the town provincial and depressing, and in 1898 took the position of Chief Conductor of the Riga Opera, Latvia. While there, he converted to Christianity, probably Roman Catholicism. In 1899 Walter was appointed music director of the Temeswar, Austria-Hungary (now Timisoara, Romania) Opera. Walter then returned in 1900 to Berlin, where he assumed the post of Royal Prussian Conductor at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, succeeding Franz Schalk; his colleagues there included Richard Strauss and Karl Muck. While in Berlin he also conducted the premiere of *Der arme Heinrich* by Hans Pfitzner, who became a lifelong friend.

In 1901, Walter accepted Mahler's invitation to be his assistant at the Court Opera in Vienna. Walter led Verdi's *Aida* at his debut. In 1907 he was elected by the Vienna Philharmonic to conduct its Nicolai Concert. In 1910, he helped Mahler select and coach solo singers for the premiere of Mahler's *Symphony No. 8*. In the following years Walter's conducting reputation soared as he was invited to conduct across Europe - in Prague, in London where in 1910 he conducted *Tristan and Isolde* and Ethel Smyth's *The Wreckers* at Covent Garden, and in Rome. When Mahler died on May 18, 1911, Walter was at his deathbed. On June 6, he wrote to his sister that he was to conduct the premiere of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, he did so in Munich on November 20, 1911, in the first half of an all-Mahler concert (the second half contained Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* (Mahler) On June 26, 1912 he led the Vienna Philharmonic in the world premiere of Mahler's *Symphony No. 9*.

Johannes Brahms composed his Symphony No. 2 in the summer of 1877, less than a year after the premiere of his Symphony No. 1 (Op. 68 in C minor) -- an astonishing fact given that the former had taken him fifteen years to complete. Finally confident in his abilities as a symphonist, and less troubled by the looming shadow of Beethoven, Brahms created a much more spontaneous work that was well received by both critics and audiences. When compared with the works of his contemporaries, this piece is conservative in both orchestration and formal structure. But it is by no means reactionary. Rather, Brahms revised and expanded upon the eighteenth century model, largely replacing thematic contrast with transformation and variation, and adding his distinctive richness of harmony and rhythm. There is both unity and variety in this symphony: Brahms manages to combine the light and dark, the lyrical and forceful, the extroverted and introspective -- all the while growing the piece organically from the "seed" of the very first three notes (D-C sharp-D, heard in the cellos and the double basses). This compositional economy is instinctively apparent to the ear, and helps to make the entire work intelligible without sacrificing interest or spontaneity.

Brahms's orchestration is full, rich, and often ingenious. He chooses to make the ensemble one unified voice, and has introduced his entire spectrum of instrumental colors after only 40 bars; however, one never gets the sense that he is overusing the orchestra. Instead he creates a texture in constant flux, shifting the focus of the ear, and extracting individual colors to great effect.

The piece opens with the three-note germinating cell and a simple horn melody; we are then introduced to two subjects in turn, the first announced by the violins, and the second by the cellos and violas in a luxurious duet. After developing both themes, Brahms creates an interesting recapitulation by briefly combining the initial horn melody and the first subject, and then dwelling extensively on the second subject. A short coda is attached to the end.

Two bassoons color the second movement's opening cello theme with a dark counterpoint, creating an immediate contrast to the first movement. It is here that we begin to see the more introspective side of Brahms, although this is by no means a brooding movement; there a surprising variety of expression within the slow prevailing tempo.

With the third movement, Brahms for the first time departs from a string-dominated texture, and allows a solo oboe to introduce the opening theme, while pizzicato cellos and a woodwind choir provide accompaniment. Full of rhythmic interest, this movement has frequent meter changes, expectant fermatas, and Brahms' distinctive cross-rhythms.

The moody and unpredictable finale oscillates between manic energy and somberness; Brahms is constantly changing direction, sometimes so abruptly as to pull the rug out from beneath your feet. The motion never stops, and when the final D major fanfare arrives, one has the sense of having been on a wild ride.

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I - Allegro Non Troppo 15:09

II - Adagio Non Troppo 10:39

III - Allegretto Grazioso 5:34

IV - Allegro Con Spirito 9:37

Total Time 40:59

Transferred from a 15ips tape Recorded by Columbia Records 1960



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