

Eugene Ormandy

Born: November 18, 1899 - Budapest, Hungary

Died: March 12, 1985 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

The musical career of the outstanding Hungarian-born American conductor, Eugene Ormandy (real name, Jenő Blau), began at a surprisingly young age. He could identify symphonies at the age of 3 and could play the violin at the age of 4. When he was 5, he became the youngest pupil in the history of the Royal Academy of Music in Budapest. By the time he was 10, he was performing for the royal family of Austria-Hungary. Ormandy's early musical experiences were made possible by his father, who wanted his son to become a world-renowned violinist.

In 1936, Eugene Ormandy was asked to conduct the Budapest Orchestra, much to his father's disappointment. Ormandy once said that his father did not realize how much more important it was to be a great conductor than a great violinist.

Eugene Ormandy was invited to undertake a concert tour of the USA, playing violin, but when he arrived he discovered he had been misled and the tour had fallen through. Down to his last nickel, Ormandy happened to run into an old friend, who was also a musician from Budapest, in a New York coffee shop near Broadway. The friend advised Ormandy to call Erno Rapee, who conducted the Capitol Theater Symphony.

Following his friend's advice Eugene Ormandy auditioned for Rapee, who responded, "You are much too good to play in a movie house. You should be playing in Carnegie Hall!" Ormandy played in the Capitol Theater Symphony orchestra, then made his conducting debut in 1924. During this time, Ormandy was greatly influenced by Arturo Toscanini at the New York Philharmonic. This influence would later show in Ormandy's precision and balance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, resulting in a totally unique sound.

Later, as a member of the CBS Radio conducting staff, Eugene Ormandy became one of radio's first important conductors. His work conducting symphonic music for commercial programs was hailed for its "finish, spirit, and accuracy."

The turning point in Eugene Ormandy's career came in 1931 when he was invited to replace Toscanini, who was slated for a guest performance with the Philadelphia Orchestra, but had suddenly become ill. Although his manager, Arthur Judson, advised him against it, Ormandy chose to do it and became an overnight sensation. He would later state, when asked what was his greatest single moment, "When I replaced Toscanini to conduct this orchestra."

In 1936, Eugene Ormandy became associate conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski, then in 1938, he was promoted to permanent conductor. It was during his time with the Philadelphia Orchestra that he became known as the "modest little maestro." He created an orchestra renowned for its warm romantic sound and developed an ensemble rapport that has been compared to a good varsity team. He personally hired every one of the 104 musicians who played under his baton.

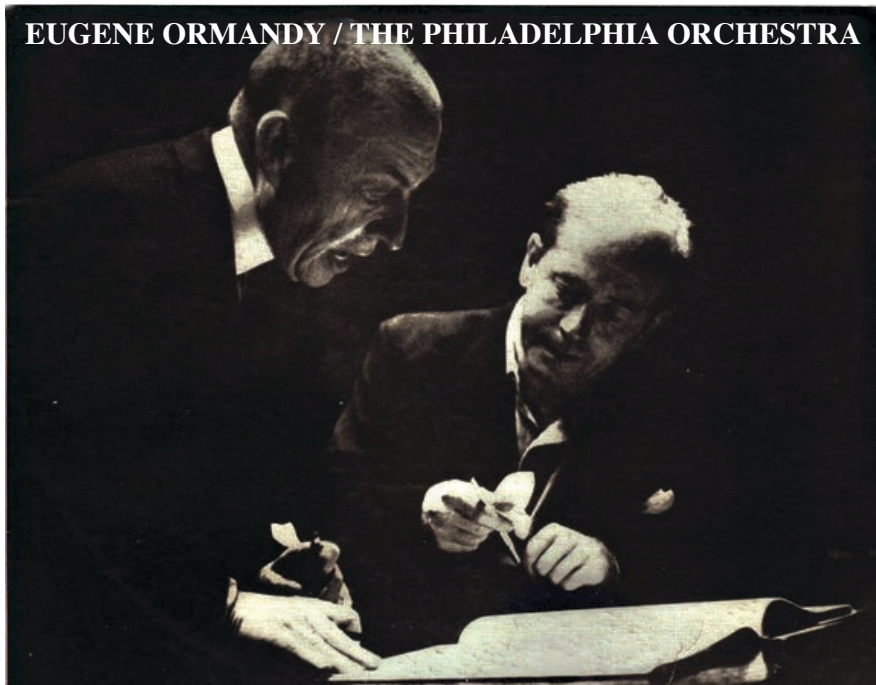
In 1970, Eugene Ormandy cried as he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom "for bringing to each performance something more precious than his great gifts--himself and the rich experiences of his life." His sound was heard throughout the world for they toured extensively. In 1973, Ormandy's orchestra became the first American symphony to visit the People's Republic of China.

Eugene Ormandy conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra for an unprecedented 44 years. He retired from full-time music-making in 1980 and became conductor emeritus. Appropriately, his last concert was with the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall on January 10, 1984. He died in 1985, of pneumonia, at the age of 85.



# RACHMANINOFF / SYMPHONY NO. 2

EUGENE ORMANDY / THE PHILADELPHIA ORCHESTRA



Symphony No. 2 in E minor, Op. 27 is a symphony by the Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff, written in 1906–07. The premiere was conducted by the composer himself in Saint Petersburg on 8 February 1908. Its duration is approximately 60 minutes when performed uncut; cut performances can be as short as 35 minutes. The score is dedicated to Sergei Taneyev, a Russian composer, teacher, theorist, author, and pupil of Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky. Alongside his Piano Concerto No. 2 and Piano Concerto No. 3, this symphony remains one of the composer's best known compositions.

At the time his Symphony No. 2 was composed, Rachmaninoff had had two successful seasons as the conductor of the Imperial Opera at the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. He considered himself first and foremost a composer and felt that the performance schedule was detracting from his time to compose. He then moved his wife and infant daughter to Dresden, Germany, to spend more time composing and to also escape the political tumult that would put Russia on the path to revolution. The family remained in Dresden for three years, spending summers at Rachmaninoff's in-law's estate of Ivanovka. It was during this time that Rachmaninoff wrote not only his Second Symphony, but also the tone poem *Isle of the Dead*.

Rachmaninoff was not altogether convinced that he was a gifted symphonist. At its 1897 premiere, his Symphony No. 1 (conducted by Alexander Glazunov) was considered an utter disaster; criticism of it was so harsh that it sent the young composer into a bout of depression. Even after the success of his Piano Concerto No. 2 (which won the Glinka Award and 500 rubles in 1904), Rachmaninoff still lacked confidence in his writing. He was very unhappy with the first draft of his Second Symphony but after months of revision he finished the work and conducted the premiere in 1908 to great applause. The work earned him another Glinka Award ten months later. The triumph regained Rachmaninoff's sense of self-worth as a symphonist.

Because of its formidable length, Symphony No. 2 has been the subject of many revisions, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s, which reduced the piece from nearly an hour to as little as 35 minutes. Before 1970 the piece was usually performed in one of its revised, shorter, versions. Since then orchestras have used the complete version almost exclusively, although sometimes with the omission of a repeat in the first movement.

# RACHMANINOFF / SYMPHONY NO. 2

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- 1 Largo. Allegro moderato 16:30
- 2 Allegro molto 8:00
- 3 Adagio 11:57
- 4 Allegro vivace 11:16
- Total Time: 47:43

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

Recorded April 19, 1959, Philadelphia, PA by Columbia Records

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