

movements, lasting a combined half-hour, assume fairly standard structures. The first movement (marked *Allegro molto*) follows an audible sonata form with the expected first and second theme areas, transitions, developments, and modulations, though it reverses the recapitulation so that it mirrors, rather than repeats, the theme areas of the exposition. The opening motive, comprised most predominantly of a tense half step followed by a stark leap of a sharp seventh, establishes the tense and mysterious mood of the movement, which undoubtedly owes some of its orchestrational and melodic drama to Walton's film work during the war years. A close listening reveals a high level of motivic unity embedded within the musical special effects, as the initial figure makes a presence in nearly every phrase.

The inner movement, *Lento assai*, finds Walton alternately at his most evasive and his most lyrical. The arching, rhapsodic melodies in the violins and upper winds are some of his most beautiful, but find themselves challenged at every turn by pensive harmonic shifts and textural effects. Walton demonstrates a masterful management of tension when, in the minutes before the movement's denouement, a dominant pedal underscores a seemingly endless approach to an elusive cadence (a cliché à la Wagner's "Liebestod"); however, as the tension begins to settle, the basses, rather than resolving upwards by leap to the tonic, wind their way slowly and chromatically downward, creating a rather disoriented sense of repose. The finale takes the form of a *passacaglia*, with a 14-bar theme that is introduced forcefully by the orchestra in unison. The theme (which, interestingly, exhausts all 12 chromatic tones) undergoes several contrasting variations before a *scherzando* coda draws the work to a close.

William Walton

Concerto For Violin & Orchestra

Zino Francescatti, violin

Eugene Ormandy / The Philadelphia Orchestra

Symphony No. 2

George Szell And The Cleveland Orchestra



Walton first met Jascha Heifetz in 1936, and in 1938 the virtuoso violinist commissioned him to write a concerto. In the same year, the British Council for the Arts asked Walton for a work to be performed at the New York Fair in June 1939, and the prospect of an early premiere looked likely. However, Walton was dissatisfied with the last movement, which he suspected was "not difficult enough for Heifetz," and withdrew the concerto from the New York concert. At the invitation of Heifetz he sailed to the United States in 1939 to discuss it with the soloist, who made a few suggestions for changes; but war broke out in Europe, so the premiere took place in Cleveland, OH, in December 1939 with Heifetz and Artur Rodzinski conducting. The concerto was not heard in New York until 1941, when critic Virgil Thompson wrote, "Its material is inoffensive but extremely vague. Its violin writing is glittery, its texture is continuous. The whole surface of it is dainty and luxurious [but] there is very little substance beneath." Today's listeners might well feel that, on closer acquaintance, the concerto has many hidden depths. It is among the most lyrical of Walton's major works, free from the tensions that mark his Symphony No. 1 and full of quirky, seemingly improvisatory surprises. Its tonality is precarious and rhythms complex; yet in many respects it is one of Walton's most romantic works.

The first movement (*Andante tranquillo*) is the slowest of the three and highly demanding on the soloist. The second movement (*Presto capriccioso alla Napolitana*) is mostly very fast, with a song-like middle section in waltz time marked *Cantelina*. The finale (*Vivace*), marked *Tema con improvazione*, starts in a lively 3/4 tempo and contains some of Walton's most eloquent inventions, with

much thematic interweaving ending in a spectacular flourish. Two of the variations are for full orchestra, and two for solo violin.

There is no sign of the doubt and indecision that preceded the work in its final form. Delicate and full-blooded by turns, its most attractive qualities lie in the ways in which Walton's lively imagination spreads a sunny, Mediterranean glow over what is, by any standards, a challenge to both players and listeners. William Walton's Second Symphony was premiered in 1960 by the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. The work's initial reception was lukewarm. Having long established a compositional style that avoided the technical trends of high modernism, his tonally-grounded music was dismissed by more academically-minded audiences; at the same time, more casual listeners failed to penetrate the friendly surface of his music to find its subtle nuances and innovations, and several critics complained that the Second Symphony offered nothing new. The renewed interest in tonality (and/or reaction against atonality) at the end of the twentieth century, however, resulted in a reassessment of Walton's musical language and a reengagement with nearly forgotten works like the Symphony No. 2. This trend has facilitated the sort of reaction promised by one of a handful of this work's early fans. "The Second Symphony," wrote a critic speaking for the minority, "is curiously reluctant to yield its secrets and inner meanings through a few hearings. Not that it is difficult music, but it does need concentrated and frequent listening before the veil parts and one is admitted to the inner circle of its highly distinctive sound-world."

The Symphony No. 2 is scored for substantial orchestral forces, will full strings and brass, triple winds, two harps, piano, and a large percussion battery. Its three

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- Concerto For Violin And Orchestra**
- 1 Andante Tranquillo 10:35**
 - 2 Presto Capriccioso Alla Napolitana 6:10**
 - 3 Vivace 11:50**
- Symphony No. 2**
- 4 Allegro Molto 8:25**
 - 5 Lento Assai 10:12**
 - 6 Passacaglie - Fugato - Coda Scherzando 8:33**

Violin Concerto Recorded by Columbia Records at Broadwood Hotel
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Symphony No. 2 Released by Columbia Records 1962



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