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BRAHMS

PIANO CONCERTO
NO. 2

GRIEG

PIANO CONCERTO

*CHARLES MUNCH
ANTAL DORATI*



ARTHUR
RUBINSTEIN



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Piano Concerto no. 2, Op. 83

Boston Symphony Orchestra

Charles Munch, *conductor*

Johannes **BRAHMS**

(1833-1897)

THE RUBINSTEIN COLLECTION

Edvard **GRIEG**

(1843-1907)

Piano Concerto, Op. 16

RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra

Antal Dorati, *conductor*

BRAHMS

PIANO CONCERTO NO. 2, OP. 83

in B-flat / B-dur / si bémol majeur (43:26)

- 1 Allegro non troppo (15:44)
- 2 Allegro appassionato (8:17)
- 3 Andante (10:54)
- 4 Allegretto grazioso (8:18)

Recorded August 11, 1952

GRIEG

PIANO CONCERTO, OP. 16

in A minor / a-moll / la mineur (26:48)

- 5 Allegro molto moderato (12:17)
- 6 Adagio - *attacca* (5:12)
- 7 Allegro moderato molto e marcato - Quasi Presto -
Andante maestoso (9:15)

Recorded August 22, 1949

DISC TIME: 70:19



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Grieg recorded in Republic Studios, Hollywood

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ON FIRST CONSIDERATION, THE TWO CONCERTOS PRESENTED ON THIS DISC MIGHT SEEM AN ODD PAIRING. One is a youthful work and imbued with Romantic ardor, the other an expression of classical values by a composer in his maturity. Moreover, their authors are generally regarded as representing divergent strains within nineteenth-century music. Johannes Brahms, more than any major composer of his era, upheld the traditions of Austro-German classicism descended from Bach, Haydn, Mozart, and especially Beethoven. Shunning program music and the more ostentatious aspects of Romantic composition, Brahms took it upon himself to extend the venerable genres of symphony, concerto, and chamber music that had been established by his artistic forebears. Edvard Grieg, on the other hand, came to ally his art with Romantic nationalism. As he matured, he turned increasingly to Norwegian folk music, incorporating its distinctive inflections into his own musical vocabulary, and managing to impart through his compositions a decidedly Scandinavian spirit.

And yet, the artistic distance between Brahms and Grieg was not so great as this might suggest. Brahms was not inimical to nationalist expression by composers from the periphery of Europe, as his admiration of Dvořák attests. And Grieg, for all his eventual identification with Nordic folk music, was steeped in the musical ethos of German Romanticism. He had trained at the famed Leipzig Conservatory, which Mendelssohn had founded and where Schumann had taught, and the work of both these composers formed an important early influence on his musical thinking. Indeed, Grieg's first compositions show him emulating the style and forms of the German masters with fair success. Not surprisingly, in view of this, Grieg was a great admirer of Brahms. In 1896, the year before the latter composer's death, he visited Brahms in Vienna and spent some enjoyable days with him. Later he wrote to Brahms from Norway, urging a visit to that country and expressing his certainty that the landscape would inspire a new symphony from the German composer.

The Teutonic influence of the Conservatory was still strong in Grieg in 1868 when, at the age of twenty-five, he began composing his Piano Concerto in A Minor. Grieg even intimated that he modeled this work on Schumann's Piano Concerto in the same key, and it is not difficult

to see certain similarities. The opening minute, in which a tumbling cascade of sonorities from the piano introduces a melody in A minor given out by the orchestra, offers a close parallel to the initial measures of Schumann's celebrated concerto. Other details, including the overall shape and proportions of the three-movement design, provide further points of comparison. Nevertheless, this is no mere copy, and Grieg's own decidedly Romantic temperament is very much in evidence. The bravura piano writing, the effusive second theme in the initial movement (assigned to the soulful voices of the cellos), the hint of Norwegian folk song in some of its themes and the intimation of a woodland spirit in the flute solo midway through the finale—all these show Grieg looking beyond the straight and narrow path of the Austro-German classical tradition to a more free, colorful and uninhibited mode of expression.

Brahms' B-flat Concerto, by contrast, conveys a sense of grandeur suggesting a mature artist at the height of his powers. Brahms was, in fact, nearly fifty when he wrote this work, which is widely regarded as the summit of his musical output. The concerto is striking in its proportions. Its length, the scope of its ideas, and its great variety of moods and colors create the impression of an epic work, while the unusual inclusion of a

scherzo movement expands its dimensions to those of a symphony. It is not true, however, that this is simply a symphony with pianoaccompaniment, as early critics of the piece claimed. As in Grieg's concerto, the solo instrument establishes its importance from the start, in this case echoing the opening call of the French horn. And while avoiding the sorts of virtuoso flourishes that Grieg occasionally employs, the keyboard writing is sufficiently demanding to make this one of the most challenging concertos in the literature.

Arthur Rubinstein's relationships with these two concertos was the opposite of what one might expect. The work of the mature composer, the Brahms B-flat, had been a favorite since his youth. "Ever since the first time I heard it," the pianist declared in *My Young Years* (Knopf, 1973), the first volume of his two-part autobiography, "I considered it as 'my' concerto." He played the work from early in his career and, over the course of more than half a century, performed it with some of the leading conductors of his era: Ernő (Ernst von) Dohnányi, Arthur Rodzinski, Albert Coates, John Barbirolli, Serge Koussevitzky, George Szell, Eugene Ormandy, Alfred Wallenstein, Josef Krips, Kiril Kondrashin, and Carlo Maria Giulini, among others.

By contrast, Rubinstein came late to Grieg's youthful concerto. Although this work won the admiration of Liszt and other musicians associated with the Romantic movement of the nineteenth century, it enjoyed little favor among the more classically inclined artists and listeners in Germany, where Rubinstein received his early training. Writing of Grieg's work, Rubinstein recalled that "this concerto had been rather disdained by the musical circle of my early Berlin days, and I was greatly influenced by that." Accordingly, the pianist did not take up the piece until the late 1930s, by which time he was past the age of fifty. His success with it helped overcome his earlier antipathy. "The Grieg," Rubinstein wrote, "which I had called 'cheap stuff' in my impudent young years, later became more endearing [to me] with every performance." It must have, for Rubinstein not only played this concerto frequently during the latter part of his career but recorded it no fewer than five times. The present rendition, made with the conductor Antal Dorati, dates from 1949.

—Paul Schiavo

Paul Schiavo writes about music for a variety of publications throughout the United States. His articles appear regularly in the program books of Lincoln Center, the Saint Louis Symphony, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Seattle Opera and other major musical organizations.



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