



BRAHMS

Piano Concerto No. 2

SCHUMANN

Kinderszenen

Artur Schnabel

**BBC Symphony Orchestra
Adrian Boult**

Historical Recordings 1935 and 1947

Great Pianists • Artur Schnabel (1882-1951)

BRAHMS: Piano Concerto No. 2 • SCHUMANN: Kinderszenen

There is a story about a small boy in Vienna who, on the way to his piano lesson, was passing a music shop. In the window was displayed a new work which he bought as a gift for his piano teacher. Upon presenting it to his teacher he was greeted with explosions and insults and told to leave the class. The teacher was Leschetizky, the music was by Brahms, and the boy was Artur Schnabel.

Through his lessons in composition with Mandiczewski, the twelve-year-old occasionally went on Sunday picnics with a group that included Brahms. The great composer always asked the same two questions: before the meal if young Artur was hungry, and afterwards if he had had enough to eat. Although Schnabel came to be known particularly for his interpretations of Beethoven and Schubert, he was not deterred by the unfortunate episode with Leschetizky from playing Brahms throughout his career at the beginning of which he often performed both piano concertos. In the latter part of his career he tended to play *Piano Concerto No.1* less, but played *No.2* at the Royal Albert Hall in London as late as 1947. At around this time he expressed his feelings upon the music of Brahms and Wagner. "Brahms wrote only self-contained music, and none that is associated with visible action. He was therefore the hero of the more exclusive group, the more refined and individualised. Wagner provided the sensation needed by those who desired escape – or simplicity. But Brahms and Wagner had much more in common than most musicians have. Today they appear to me as musical brothers. I think Wagner to be the greater genius. He tried to solve new problems, express grandiose visions. Yet Brahms' untheatrical and less pretentious work is closer to me. What they have in common is romantic pessimism, romantic sensuousness and sentimentality."

Schnabel played the *Second Concerto* of Brahms

throughout his career and not, as one might have expected, only in the latter part. As he said himself in 1945, "Usually you start with Bach and Mozart and, finally, the last you learn is Brahms. But I started with Brahms and now gradually I am coming to Mozart. Initially I was labelled a Brahms player in Leipzig and a Schubert player in Munich. So I had two labels originally, but soon I became chiefly the 'Brahms player' because Schubert had not written any works for piano and orchestra and in the first twenty years of my career I played very much with orchestras and most often the Brahms concertos."

Schnabel was born in 1882, the year that the *Second Concerto* was published. In 1902 the great conductor Arthur Nikisch, after one interview, asked the twenty-year-old Schnabel to play the *Second Concerto* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in Berlin and Hamburg as well as with the Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig. In 1904 he was invited to London by Hans Richter to play the same work for the Royal Philharmonic Society. It is interesting to see at this young age Schnabel's style is already being referred to as 'scholarly': "The Queen, who has been an assiduous concert-goer of late, also favoured the Richter concert on February 16th, where she heard excellent performances of Schubert's too-rarely-played symphony in C, Beethoven's second Leonora overture, and a Wagnerian selection. At this concert Herr Artur Schnabel, a new pianist, made his London debut, and earned much applause for a scholarly performance of Brahms's Second Concerto. The good impression he made was subsequently confirmed at a recital on February 20th. Herr Schnabel is not a pianist of the 'fireworks' school, but his method is sound, and he has considerable command of expression." At the Brahms Centenary Festival in Vienna in May 1933 Schnabel performed the work with Wilhelm Furtwängler as well as trios and

quartets with Hubermann, Hindemith and Casals.

When Schnabel started making records in 1929 it was not a pleasant experience: "Memories of my first year of making records in London belong to the most painful recollections of my life. I suffered agonies and was in a state of despair each time I recorded. I felt as if I was harried to death – and most unhappy. Everything was artificial – the light, the air, the sound – and it took me quite a long time to get the company to adjust some of their equipment to music, and even longer to adjust myself to the equipment, however much improved it was. Then perhaps I became more indulgent – I no longer expected and demanded so much. Even so, one day after I had worked with this company for seven years, they told me that my nickname among the employees and engineers was still 'The Changer'. For ten years, from 1929 to 1939, I made all my recordings with the same engineer [Edward Fowler], so in the end the two of us did the work quite alone. There was no interference and I was, by then, very pleased with the spirit of the thing. In the meantime, everything had been changed. Acoustic conditions had become better and there were also certain improvements in the technique of recording."

The recording of the *Second Concerto* was made on 7th November 1935 at the HMV studio 1 in Abbey Road at a time when the engineers were experimenting with recordings of large forces such as a symphony orchestra. Two recording machines running in parallel were used and, apart from side 1, first takes were published from this session. Things seemed to be all right until the artists reached the *Andante* where not only did second takes have to be made but even experiments with single microphones were tried for some of the sides (no doubt for the cello solo). Much of this seems to have been unsuccessful as at another session on 14th November 1935 sides 1 and 6-12 had to be re-recorded.

In January 1936 HMV advertised the newly released recording of the concerto: 'The first widespread recognition in this country of Schnabel's genius was at the first performance he gave of Brahms' B flat Pianoforte Concerto at a concert of the Royal Philharmonic Society. London had never heard a performance of such transcendental beauty, such vividness and purity of imagination, such ravishing tone, such perfect rhythm. Since it was known that Schnabel had signed an extensive contract with "His Master's Voice," we have had thousands of requests that he should record this masterpiece, and now at last we have pleasure in publishing these records.'

A contemporary review rather pompously concluded, "He lacks the spirit to gambol. The Hungarian gypsy gets little look in. This apart, the recording is to be welcomed as a solid, well-graced piece of work."

At his post-war HMV sessions in 1947, although only 65, Schnabel had four years to live and, like the Brahms pieces he chose to record, Schumann's *Kinderszenen* is introspective and personal. A pupil, Konrad Wolff, noted Schnabel's view of one of them: 'Many Schumann pieces have a walking rhythm which has to be treated as yet another dance rhythm, as for instance in '*Glückes genug*' from *Kinderszenen*. At the end of this piece, the continued steps must be secured despite the slowing-down marked by the composer. Schnabel's way of protecting the basic rhythm was that he made no *ritardando* in the semiquavers preceding each step. He played them at the same absolute speed as before in spite of the slowed-down pulse, and thus, in the listener's mind, their identity was preserved.' Although not as poetic as Cortot or Moiseiwitsch in this work, Schnabel's unsentimental approach makes his performance sound fresh and modern.

Jonathan Summers

Mark Obert-Thorn

Mark Obert-Thorn is one of the world's most respected transfer artist/engineers. He has worked for a number of specialist labels, including Pearl, Biddulph, Romophone and Music & Arts. Three of his transfers have been nominated for Gramophone Awards. A pianist by training, his passions are music, history and working on projects. He has found a way to combine all three in the transfer of historical recordings.

Obert-Thorn describes himself as a 'moderate interventionist' rather than a 'purist' or 're-processor,' unlike those who apply significant additions and make major changes to the acoustical qualities of old recordings. His philosophy is that a good transfer should not call attention to itself, but rather allow the performances to be heard with the greatest clarity.

There is no over-reverberant 'cathedral sound' in an Obert-Thorn restoration, nor is there the tinny bass and piercing mid-range of many 'authorised' commercial issues. He works with the cleanest available 78s, and consistently achieves better results than restoration engineers working with the metal parts from the archives of the modern corporate owners of the original recordings. His transfers preserve the original tone of the old recordings, maximising the details in critical upper mid-range and lower frequencies to achieve a musical integrity that is absent from many other commercially released restorations.

Producer's Note

The Schumann recording was transferred from HMV shellacs, its only form of issue. A set of U.S. Victor "Z" pressings was the source for the Brahms concerto.

Mark Obert-Thorn

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

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ADD

BRAHMS • SCHUMANN
Piano Concerto No. 2 • KinderszenenArtur Schnabel (1882-1951)
BBC Symphony Orchestra • Adrian BoultPlaying
Time
62:16

SCHNABEL • Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 2

NAXOS Historical

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**SCHUMANN: Kinderszenen, Op. 15**

- 1 Von fremden Ländern und Menschen (About foreign lands and peoples)
- 2 Kuriose Geschichte (A curious story)
- 3 Hasche-Mann (Catch me if you can)
- 4 Bittendes Kind (Pleading child)
- 5 Glückes genug (Perfect happiness)
- 6 Wichtige Begebenheit (An important event)
- 7 Träumerei (Dreaming)
- 8 Am Kamin (By the fireside)
- 9 Ritter von Steckenpferd (Knight of the hobby-horse)
- 10 Fast zu ernst (Almost too serious)
- 11 Fürchtenmachen (Frightening)
- 12 Kind im Einschlummern (Child falling asleep)
- 13 Der Dichter spricht (The poet speaks)

Recorded 3rd June, 1947 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 3, London
(on matrices 2EA 12066-3, 12085-2, 12086-1 and 12084-1). First issued on HMV DB 6502/3.**BRAHMS: Piano Concerto No. 2 in B flat major, Op. 83**

- 14 Allegro non troppo
- 15 Allegro appassionato
- 16 Andante *
- 17 Allegro grazioso

Recorded 7th and 14th November, 1935 in EMI Abbey Road Studio No. 1, London
(on matrices 2EA 1590-3B, 1591-1, 1592-1, 1593-1, 1594-1, 1595-2B, 1596-3A, 1597-3, 1598-3B, 1599-2B,
1600-2A and 2801-3B. First issued on HMV DB 2696/2701. (* Lauri Kennedy, cello)

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Special thanks to Don Tait and Marina and Victor Ledin for providing
source material for this release.www.naxos.com

Cover Photograph: Artur Schnabel (Private Collection)

16:59

1:13
1:03
0:31
0:47
1:19
0:54
2:44
0:51
0:45
1:30
1:14
1:58
2:10

45:16

15:53
8:11
12:34
8:38

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