

Mastering Equipment Used In Our Recordings

Digital: Weiss ADC2 Analog to Digital Converter
Mytek ADC192 Modified by Steve Nugent of Empirical Audio
Lynx AES16 used for digital I/O
Antelope Audio Isochrone OCX Master Clock
Weiss Saracon Sample Rate Conversion Software
Weiss POW-r Dithering Software
Analog: Studer 810 Reel to Reel with JRF Magnetics Custom Z Heads & Siltech wiring
Aria tape head pre-amp by ATR Services
Manley Tube Tape Pre-amps Modified by Fred Volz of Emotive Audio
Cables: Purist Audio Design, Pure Note, Siltech
Power Cords: Purist Audio Design, Essential Sound Products
Vibration Control: Symposium Acoustics Rollerblocks, Ultra platforms, Svelte shelves
Sonic Studio CD.1 Professional CD Burner using Mitsui Gold Archival CD's

Facts About This Recording

Recorded by Decca

Jan. 27, 28 & 30, 1967 in Kingsway Hall London, England

Producer: Erik Smith • Engineer: Kenneth Wilkinson

Brahms Piano Concerto No. 2

Vladimir Ashkenazy, piano
Zubin Mehta conducts the
London Symphony Orchestra



Between the premieres of Brahms' First and Second Piano Concerti, over twenty years passed. Those intervening decades had been spent producing two symphonies, two overtures, the Haydn Variations, the Violin Concerto, the Hungarian Dances, and dozens of songs, piano works, and chamber compositions. The man who had been a young unknown was now one of the most famed living composers in all of Germany and Austria, yet in all that time, he had not returned to the piano concerto, even though he was himself a pianist. Brahms' rationale is not hard to divine. The premiere of that First Concerto in 1859 had been one of the greatest failures of his early years. The work's second performance had actually been greeted with scorn from the audience, and as the composer himself remarked at the time, "the hissing was rather too much!" After such an experience, he was understandably reluctant to try again. Not until his career was solidly established did Brahms venture to place another piano concerto before the public.

Brahms began the Second Concerto in 1878 under the inspiration of an Italian vacation. The work was soon set aside in favor of a violin concerto, and Brahms did not take it up again until another Italian visit three years later. Once the score was completed in July of 1881, he sent it to his friend Theodore Billroth. Both a surgeon and a

musician, Billroth was the man for whom Brahms had written his first two string quartets. The men had been good friends for years. In fact, Billroth had been amongst the travelers who joined in the composer's first Italian excursion. He may have seen the concerto's early sketches. So perhaps he understood the joke in the letter which Brahms enclosed with his score, in which the composer noted dryly, "I am sending you some little piano pieces." Those "little piano pieces" turned out to be a four-movement concerto nearly an hour in length, a work grander than any of Brahms' symphonies, of greater scope than any concerto written by any composer to that day, surpassing even Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. Its premiere, given in Budapest in 1881 with the composer as soloist, was a great success, and within several months, he performed the piece to enthusiastic audiences in a dozen European cities. Such popular acclaim must have tasted sweet after the failure of the previous concerto. It is evidence not only of the magnificence of this new piece, but also of how far Brahms had come in the public consciousness, for this work, less stormy yet no less ambitious than its predecessor, benefited from being the effort of a household name.