

ASPECTS OF BRAHMS

A pair of Seconds go head to head

Two significant historic recordings of Brahms's Second Symphony provide marked contrasts in performance style and, regrettably, in sound quality. A handsome three-CD plus DVD collection on the Profil Medien label devoted to the complete recordings by the Staatskapelle Dresden under **Fritz Busch** includes a fabulous radio performance of the




Brahms from February 1931, lissom though flexible and with one of the fastest and most thrillingly played accounts of the finale ever recorded.

Regrettably the sound is seriously emaciated, partially due I would imagine to constricted source material, though over-zealous noise reduction is, I suspect, just as much to blame. Still, it's good enough for you to "get the gist", as they say, and the rest of the set is fascinating.





The first CD features Busch's all-but-unknown 1923 acoustic recordings with the Dresden orchestra, some short movements but with a handful of real gems – a beautifully drawn rendition of Gluck's "Dance of the Blessed Spirits" for example, and characterful accounts of the overtures to *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Bartered Bride*, *The Beautiful Galatea*, *The Nutcracker* and *Die Fledermaus*. The second CD includes the *Tannhäuser* Overture (1932), extracts from *Turandot* (with Schoffler, Tessmer etc, recorded in 1926, the year of the premiere) and a bonus sequence, with Rose Pauly Dreesen and a "large studio orchestra", from Strauss's *The Egyptian Helen*. The DVD is a Busch documentary with some interesting footage and revealing interviews (there are English subtitles) and the 190-page booklet is chock-full of photos and valuable facts. A handsome production all round, and the remaining transfers are in general better than the Brahms symphony. The "other"



Brahms Second arrives via Pristine Audio, a warm-hearted live account from 1951 by the New York Philharmonic under **Bruno Walter**, similar in all essentials to their

Columbia commercial recording from the same period, with similar tempi but with a degree of spontaneity and a yielding lyricism that pay highest dividends in the *Adagio non troppo* second movement. This is Walter's Brahms at its most radiantly expressive, and Andrew Rose's remastering is the best we've had so far. 

The Recordings

- **Various Cpsrs** Cpte Dresden Recordings **Busch**
Profil Medien   +  PH07032
- **Brahms** Sym No 2 **Walter**
Pristine Audio  PASC124