

JOHN KNOWLES PAINE
Symphony No. 2 in A, Op. 34 (Im Frühling)

New World Records 80350

The premieres of John Knowles Paine's two symphonies—the First in 1876, the Second in 1880—may be said to mark the effective beginning of the American symphonic tradition. Nearly a half century later, another distinguished American composer, George W. Chadwick, who had been a young man in Boston in the 1870s, recalled that the Paine symphonies were "a stimulus and an inspiration to more than one ambitious musician of that time."

Paine (1839-1906) studied with a German immigrant musician in Portland, Maine, then went to Berlin for several years. (Fuller biographical details can be found on the New World recording of Paine's Mass in D, New World 80262.) Upon returning to the United States, he settled in Boston, where his Mass in D persuaded many that here was a significant new voice. In 1873 he was named assistant professor of music at Harvard. The rest of his career combined composition with teaching.

Immediately after his Harvard appointment, Paine entered a particularly prolific period, turning out in quick succession the Symphony No. 1 and the Violin Sonata (1875), an Overture to *As You Like It* and a Symphonic Poem on *The Tempest* (1876), the Duo Concertante for violin, cello, and orchestra (1877), the Symphony No. 2 (1879), and a complete incidental score for orchestra and male chorus to *Oedipus tyrannus* in the original Greek (1880-81). He spent a large part of the last two decades of his life completing the opera *Azara*, which he was never to hear.

During this time, he was a distinguished teacher as well; the roster of his pupils includes composers John Alden Carpenter, Frederick S. Converse, Arthur Foote, Edward Burlingame Hill, and Daniel Gregory Mason.

Following the enthusiastic reception of his First Symphony in 1876, Paine began work on his Second. The eagerly awaited work was performed by two different Boston orchestras on consecutive days. The Boston Philharmonic played it under Bernard Listemann at Sanders Theater, in Cambridge, on Wednesday evening, March 10, 1880. The next afternoon the Harvard Musical Association, Carl Zerrahn conducting, performed it at the Music Hall, downtown.

Since both ensembles were essentially pick-up orchestras (not until the founding of the Boston Symphony Orchestra a year later did Boston have a permanent orchestra of stable membership), the performances were no doubt rather rough-and-ready. Yet from the first the symphony evoked expressions of nationalistic pride and fervor. At the premiere in Cambridge, according to Richard Aldrich,

...ladies waved handkerchiefs, men shouted in approbation, and the highly respected John S. Dwight, arbiter in Boston of criticism, if not of manners, stood in his seat frantically opening and shutting his umbrella as an expression of uncontrollable enthusiasm.

The *Gazette* called Paine's symphony "by far the finest work hitherto written on American soil by an American composer." The length of the work, though--nearly fifty minutes, a good deal longer than Paine's First--proved a stumbling block to audiences who still regarded sitting through a Brahms

symphony as an intellectual exercise, not a musical pleasure. Moreover, the symphony grows from several motifs developed in an almost Wagnerian manner and includes thematic cross-references between movements which benefit from repeated hearings to achieve their maximum effectiveness. Still, the critics found the expressive sense of the symphony as a whole clear from the outset.

The work's success induced the music publisher Arthur P. Schmidt to propose printing the score, provided enough copies were subscribed in advance to guarantee his costs. The subscription requirements were easily met, and Paine's Second Symphony became the first American symphonic work to be published in full score.

Critics of the time debated whether the symphony leaned dangerously toward the radical tone poems of Liszt. Though Paine certainly had programmatic ideas in planning his symphony, he downplayed them in early performances. The printed score provides no verbal clue as to the expressive aim of each movement. But a contemporary analysis by A.J. Goodrich (in *Complete Musical Analysis*, 1889) presumably used information from the composer in providing the following titles:

- I. Introduction. *Adagio sostenuto*. "Departure of Winter." *Allegro ma non troppo*. "Awakening of Nature."
- II. *Scherzo. Allegro*. "May-Night Fantasy."
- III. *Adagio*. "A Romance of Springtime."
- IV. *Allegro gioioso*. "The Glory of Nature."

The first movement's introduction, in A minor, is built on a pregnant motif stated at the outset in the lower strings. This "winter" theme recurs throughout the movement and underlies motifs of similar shape throughout the work. After a fortissimo outburst of the full orchestra, the violins introduce a rapid turn figure over a restatement of the "winter" theme. At first this seems purely decorative, but in fact it anticipates the "thawing" of winter into spring, which occurs when the first violins, unaccompanied, take up the four-note figure (E D B D) in half-notes, then quarter notes, then eighths, then sixteenths--a simple but remarkably effective suggestion of the wintry world melting at the coming of spring.

A new theme, in A major, introduces the lengthy sonata movement that follows. The "winter" theme and the main theme of the Allegro are developed sometimes together in counterpoint, at other times in new separate treatments. Moreover, the sixteenth-note ostinato that ushered in the spring hovers in the background, a hint of burgeoning new life. The coda combines all of the themes in a remarkable blend of technique and expressiveness.

The second movement is a vigorous Scherzo in D minor, filled with a jocular, rough humor, mysterious harmonies, and elfin games in the woodwinds, while the contrasting middle section in the major mode suspends the lyricism of the woodwinds over the darker, measured tremolo in the strings.

The Adagio is a passionate outpouring of lyricism, a rather Schumannesque movement in F major. Each return of the main theme is more elaborately and lushly scored, until a sudden collapse into a hushed reverie brings the coda, with its understated combination of themes heard against the soft reiteration of a horn call, like echoes from the depths of the woods.

Paine's finale erupts splendidly with joyous energy. A figure heard in the lower strings, leaping upward with a trill, recalls the chill of the first movement's "winter" theme, now joyously turned to spring. Other versions of that figure appear in new guises, sometimes turned upside down, sometimes with echoes of the Scherzo's first theme. The overflowing abundance culminates in a broad, lyric, hymn-like phrase. All of these elements enter into the elaborate development except the hymn, which returns in the recapitulation and, even more majestically, in the coda, as the climax of the entire symphony.

Why has such a rich work come to be so neglected? Since much of American concert life from the nineteenth century and well into this one was in the hands of German-born and German-trained musicians, it was only natural that their tastes should have colored the character of the music performed and composed, such as Paine's. Then, ironically, after World War I and the appearance of a new generation of composers, led by Aaron Copland, the rules of the game changed. It suddenly became important to sound "American"; anything redolent of German tradition was simply tossed out. In the process, we lost sight of an entire generation of talented composers and, quite literally, hundreds of compositions. But happily, we are now beginning to appreciate our predecessors for their very real virtues—for the strength and energy and imagination of music that we had simply dismissed without a hearing for decades.

—Steven Ledbetter

Steven Ledbetter is *musicologist and program annotator for the Boston Symphony Orchestra*. His research interests include the music of the second New England school.

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- See also Selected Bibliography and Discography, New World 80262.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

- As You Like It*. Overture, Op. 28. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-141.
- Concert Variations on the Austrian Hymn, Op. 3, No. 1 Janice Beck, organ. Musical Heritage Society ORA-263.
- Fantasia über "Ein' feste Burg."* Op. 13. Richard Morris, organ, New World Records 80280.
- Fuga giocosa*, Op. 41, No. 3: Romance, Op. 12 Malcolm Frager, piano, New World Records 80206.
- Mass in D, Op. 10. Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Gunther Schuller conducting. New World Records 80262.
- Moorish Dance from *Azura*. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-132.
- Oedipus tyrannus*. Prelude from the incidental music, Op. 35, Eastman-Rochester Symphony, Howard Hanson conducting. RCA Victor VM-608 (78rpm).

Sonata, for violin and piano. Op. 24: Romanza and Scherzo for cello and piano, Op. 30: Larghetto and Scherzo, for piano, violin, and cello, Op. 32. Joseph Silverstein, violin: Jules Eskin, cello: Virginia Eskin, piano. Northeastern Records NR 219-CD.

Symphony No. 1 in C minor, Op. 23. American Arts Orchestra, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-103.

Symphony No. 2 in A, Op. 34 (abridged). Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-120.

The Tempest. Symphonic Poem after Shakespeare, Op. 31. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Karl Krueger conducting. Society for the Preservation of the American Musical Heritage MIA-130.

Zubin Mehta assumed the post of music director of the New York Philharmonic in the 1978-79 season. With his 1983 contract renewal he became the longest-tenured music director in the orchestra's history. Concurrently he is music director for life of the Israel Philharmonic. Mehta was born in Bombay, India, in 1936, the son of the Bombay Symphony's founder. At sixteen he began studies at Vienna's Academy of Music; he made his conducting debut in Vienna at the age of twenty-five. From 1961 to 1967 he was music director of the Montreal Symphony, and in 1962 he became music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. He conducts leading opera companies and orchestras throughout the world. His recordings are on the Columbia, London, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA, Angel, and New World labels.

The New York Philharmonic, founded in 1842, is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States and one of the oldest in the world. Among its celebrated conductors have been Gustav Mahler, Arturo Toscanini, Artur Rodzinski, Dimitri Mitropoulos, Leonard Bernstein, and Pierre Boulez. The Philharmonic has made hundreds of recordings; the first was for Columbia in 1917. Recordings of the New York Philharmonic are found on the Columbia, London, Deutsche Grammophon, RCA, and New World labels.

John Knowles Paine:

Symphony No. 2 in A, Op. 34

(Im Frühling)

1- I. Introduction: Adagio sostenuto; Allegro ma non troppo (15:30)

2- II. Scherzo: Allegro (10:04)

3- III. Adagio (14:17)

4- IV. Allegro giojoso (10:35)

New York Philharmonic

Zubin Mehta, Conductor

Producer: Elizabeth Ostrow

Recording engineer: Jack Renner

Technical support by Edward Abbott, Soundmirror, Inc.

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