

A sepia-toned portrait of Johannes Brahms, showing him from the chest up. He has a full, dark beard and mustache, and is wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera.

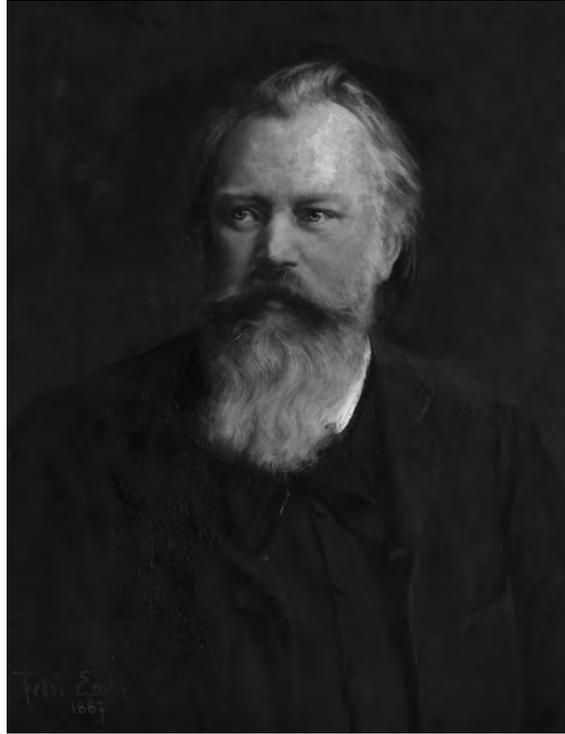
CHANDOS

BRAHMS

SYMPHONIES NOS 2 AND 4

BERGEN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

EDWARD GARDNER



Portrait painted by Fedor Eneke (1851 – 1926), now in a private collection/
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Johannes Brahms, 1878

Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897)

Symphony No. 2, Op. 73 (1877) **40:59**
in D major • in D-Dur • en ré majeur
for Large Orchestra

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Allegro non troppo | 18:18 |
| 2 | Adagio non troppo – (L'istesso tempo, ma grazioso) | 8:16 |
| 3 | Allegretto grazioso (quasi andantino) – Presto ma non assai –
Tempo I – Presto ma non assai – Tempo I | 4:57 |
| 4 | Allegro con spirito – Tranquillo – Sempre più tranquillo | 9:26 |

Symphony No. 4, Op. 98 (1884–85) **40:25**
in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur
for Large Orchestra

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 5 | Allegro non troppo | 13:07 |
| 6 | Andante moderato | 11:28 |
| 7 | Allegro giocoso – Poco meno presto – Tempo I | 6:11 |
| 8 | Allegro energico e passionato – Più allegro | 9:37 |

TT 81:24

Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra

Alexander Kagan leader

Edward Gardner

Brahms: Symphonies Nos 2 and 4

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

The decades-long and winding road that led to the appearance of his First Symphony in the summer of 1876, and its positive reception at its première that November, seems to have freed the forty-three-year-old Johannes Brahms (1833 – 1897) from any further psychological resistance to working in the genre. Indeed, according to his biographer Max Kalbeck, it was during June 1877, while preparing the four-hand piano arrangement of the First Symphony at the Carinthian lakeside town of Pörschach am Wörthersee, that he started working on a second which, he told the influential critic Eduard Hanslick, would be ‘cheerful and lovely’;¹ he promised to play it for Hanslick that winter.

In the meantime, Brahms moved to Baden-Baden in mid-September, where Clara Schumann heard of the new work, telling the conductor Hermann Levi on 24 September that ‘Brahms... has completed a new symphony in D major, at least in his head!’² On 3 October

Brahms played her the first movement and a part of the finale. The autograph score was prepared shortly after this, though the individual movements seem to have been copied out at different times (movements 1, 2 – 3, and 4 are all separately paginated). A four-hand piano arrangement was in train already in November; Brahms rehearsed it with Theodor Billroth and then gave a private performance with Ignaz Brüll in December (the manuscript of the arrangement became a Christmas present for Clara that same year).

The orchestral première, conducted by Hans Richter in the Vienna Musikvereinsaal, was due to take place as early as 9 December; but errors in the copying of the parts, which led to unavailability of sufficient rehearsal time, caused the occasion to be postponed until 30 December, Richter conducting from Brahms’s autograph. A series of further performances from the manuscript followed quickly – between January and June 1878 the symphony was heard in Leipzig, Amsterdam, den Haag, Dresden, and Düsseldorf – which led Brahms to make numerous corrections and revisions, particularly to the first

¹ heiter und lieblich

² Brahms ... hat, im Kopfe wenigstens, eine neue Symphonie in D-dur fertig.

movement. Score, parts, and arrangement were all issued by the Berlin publisher Simrock in August 1878.

If the swift, six-month composition of the Second Symphony contrasts starkly with the tortuous genesis of the First, there is a similar contrast in its tone. Although the orchestra is slightly augmented – a bass tuba is added to the three trombones, which are now used in all but the third movement rather than confined to the finale – nothing could be further from the menacing, driven opening of the First Symphony than the bucolic world conjured up by the lilting triadic motive announced by the horns after the quiet unison neighbour-note (D – C sharp – D) figure in lower strings, which is subtly manipulated throughout. In fact, transferred up a fifth and placed in the first violins, now in a dotted rhythm, this same figure, at bar 44, launches what feels like the ‘real’ beginning of the movement, the previous music seeming retrospectively to have had the function of a slow introduction while nevertheless sharing the overall *Allegro non troppo* direction (comparison to the First Symphony is again instructive here).

The triadic element, so immediately apparent at the outset on the musical surface, is built into the broader fabric

not only of the first movement but of the symphony as a whole. The first movement is a conventional sonata form design, with a repeated exposition moving from tonic to dominant, D major to A major. But *en route* to that latter key Brahms (echoing Schubert’s practice) passes through F sharp minor, articulated by a theme that will subsequently be re-presented, in the dominant key, at the end of the exposition. Thus, the exposition as a whole projects an ascent through the tonic triad, D – F sharp – A. Conversely, the keys of the first three movements move in the opposite direction, D – B – G, outlining the subdominant triad.

While Brahms had by now managed to exorcise the spectre of Beethoven, commentators still struggle to do so. Frequent recourse to subdominant harmony and the use of extended harmonic pedals are two notable aspects of Beethoven’s ‘Pastoral’ Symphony, with which Brahms’s Second has routinely been aligned. (Billroth described it to the composer as being ‘all blue sky, babbling of streams, sunshine, and cool green shade!’³) Yet the combination of triple-time metre, unconventional for a symphonic first

³ lauter blauer Himmel, Quellenrieseln, Sonnenschein und kühler grüner Schatten!

movement, and triadic theme inevitably recalls Beethoven's 'Eroica' also, as noted by Kalbeck. (This is perhaps to say that the 'Eroica' is more pastoral than we routinely take it to be.) Reinhold Brinkmann hears a particular melancholic form of pastoral in Brahms's Second, considering it to be a 'late idyll',⁴ a search for a vanished pastoral or lost state of innocence. This view accords with Brahms's own description, to Simrock on 22 November 1877, of the symphony as 'so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it. I have never written anything so sad and dark-toned...'⁵ It is admittedly difficult to square this view with the exuberance of the close of the finale, as well as with Brahms's earlier description to Hanslick, and it has often been assumed to be ironic; but perhaps we need to listen to Brahms more attentively.

Symphony No. 4 in E minor, Op. 98

Someone else who heard melancholy in the Second Symphony was the conductor Vincent Lachner. In correspondence with him in 1879, Brahms pointed to his motet 'Warum ist das Licht gegeben', Op. 74 No. 1, which

⁴ Original title of Brinkmann's book, published in English

⁵ so melancholisch, daß Sie es nicht aushalten. Ich habe noch nie so was Trauriges, Molliges geschrieben.

dates from the same period of composition, in summer 1877, at Pörschach, as the Symphony, remarking that 'it casts the necessary shadow on the serene symphony'.⁶ This austere work, in D minor rather than D major, treats of death and closes with a harmonisation of the chorale 'Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin' (the German *Nunc dimittis*).

There are parallels here with the Fourth Symphony, composed during two stays in Mürzzuschlag in north-eastern Styria over the course of a year between summer 1884 (the first two movements) and summer 1885 (the third and fourth movements); the Third Symphony had been completed in summer 1883. The opening of the first movement has been variously described as wistful, autumnal, and melancholic, even tragic; such descriptions are probably partly aroused by the series of falling thirds (B – G – E – C – A – F sharp – D sharp – B), two of them inverted to form rising minor sixths, which underpin the opening melody. These falling thirds, together with the key of E minor, link this opening strongly to that of another vocal work, the third of Brahms's *Vier ernste Gesänge*, Op. 121, 'O Tod, wie

⁶ sie wirft den nötigen Schlagschatten auf die heitere Sinfonie.

bitter bist du'. But while Brahms's song, composed more than a decade after the Fourth Symphony, in May 1896, turns from tonic minor to major as its biblical text (like that of 'Warum ist das Licht gegeben') charts a movement from resistance to acceptance of death, and so in a sense mirrors the 'darkness to light' trajectory of the First Symphony, Brahms's Fourth does no such thing: its two inner movements may celebrate the major mode (E major and C major respectively), but its outer two stick stubbornly to the minor at beginning and end: Dylan Thomas's injunction 'Do not go gentle into that good night' seems more apposite here than the consoling words of Ecclesiasticus.

The connection between symphony and song noted here (and recognised by, among others, Schoenberg, in his influential essay 'Brahms the Progressive') may of course be entirely coincidental and in no way directly attributable to Brahms. And doubt should be cast, too, on a more well-attested relation to other, older music. The finale of the Fourth Symphony takes the form of a chaconne, or passacaglia, the theme of which has, since the conductor and composer Siegfried Ochs (1858 – 1929) first made the connection, been thought to have been taken from the final chorus of Bach's early cantata *Nach dir, Herr,*

verlanget mich, BWV 150. The assimilation of historic forms and genres is of course typical for Brahms, who also served on the editorial board of the Bach-Gesellschaft; that the chaconne, and its recurring eight-bar units, is overlaid with a sonata-form design is no less characteristic, or 'progressive'. There is, however, no firm evidence for Ochs's claim, and other models have plausibly been suggested. In addition, both Bach's and Brahms's stepwise ascending lines from tonic to dominant followed by a fall back to the tonic may be thought of as 'tokens of a type', removing any need for the one to have been copied from the other.

Word that a new symphony by Brahms might be on the way began to circulate among his friends after mid-August 1884; Elisabeth von Herzogenberg made enquiries in September, and Clara Schumann likewise in early December that year. But only the first two movements had been written, and Brahms's circle had to be patient for another year. The Herzogenbergs received the autograph manuscript (initially only the first movement) in early September 1885; by the end of that month or the beginning of October, copyists were at work. Finally, on 8 October Brahms, together with Ignaz Brüll, performed the two-piano arrangement

of the symphony in the salon of Friedrich Ehrbar. Among those present were Hanslick and Hans Richter (acting as page-turners), Theodor Billroth, and the musicologist Carl Ferdinand Pohl. The reception of the first movement, according to Kalbeck's account, was decidedly less than rapturous, no-one quite knowing what to say until Hanslick announced that 'for the entire movement I felt as though I was being beaten up by two terribly intelligent people'.⁷

Hanslick's outburst apparently led to laughter, which broke the mood, and the performance continued. The remark may have been intended simply in jest, but it does advert to the undeniably serious and 'difficult' cast of this music. Whatever doubts he may have harboured following the incident, Brahms persisted, and was eventually rewarded by the positive reception of the work at its première, in Meiningen on 25 October 1885, he himself conducting from his manuscript. Some twenty-two performances followed over the next five or so months; the Symphony was heard in Vienna on 17 January 1886, and reached London

⁷ Den ganzen Satz über hatte ich die Empfindung, als ob ich von zwei schrecklich geistreichen Leuten durchgeprügelt würde.

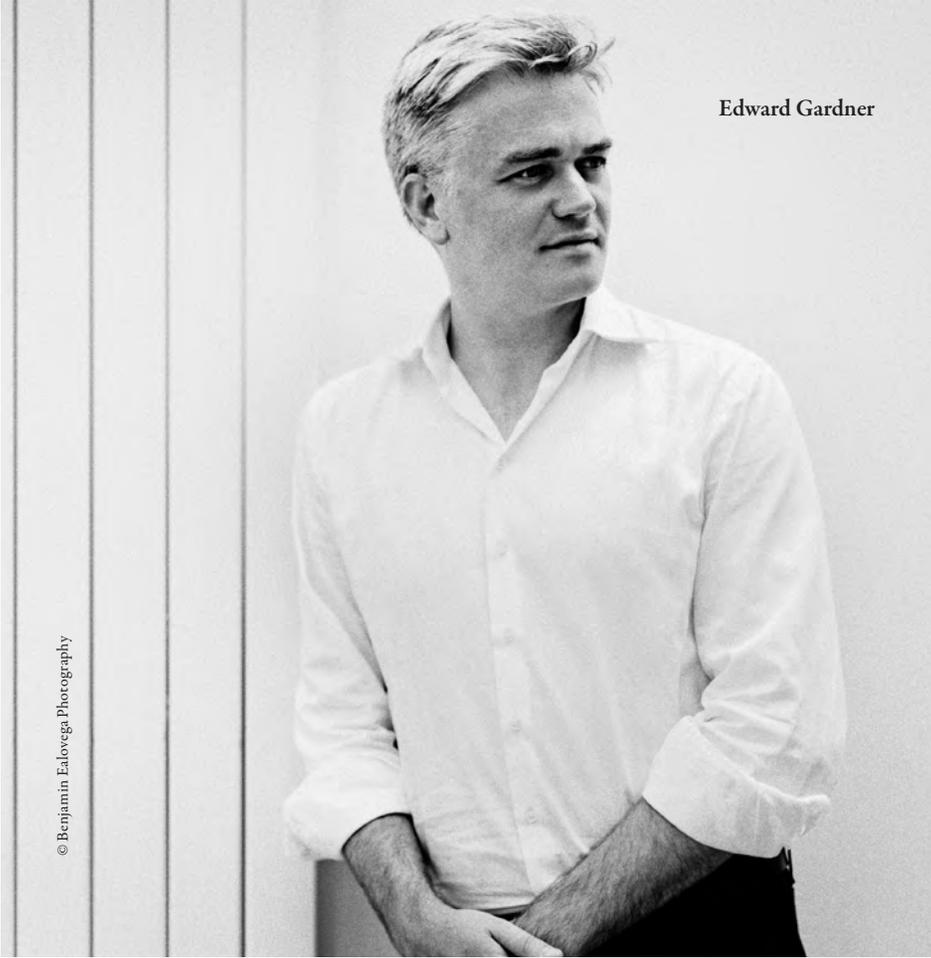
on 10 May that year, conducted by Richter at St James's Hall. *The Musical Times* was not entirely convinced, even siding to some extent with Hanslick:

It is to be observed that the more prudent connoisseurs have avoided giving a definite opinion upon the Symphony, and this reserve we both applaud and imitate. Brahms is a recondite musician who does not carry his meaning on his sleeve, or pretend to purvey 'milk for babes'. His present work may certainly be regarded as meat for strong men, and even by them not at once digested.

The first two movements were praised for their 'noble character and profound interest', while the other two were thought 'less satisfactory on first hearing'. Above all, the 'Passacaglia and variations' form was considered unsuited to 'an ideal symphonic finale'. This criticism was extended even to Beethoven's two attempts, in the 'Eroica' and the Ninth, both being

the weakest portion of those masterpieces. The unfavourable character of the form for such a position cannot be got over.

Brahms's initially sceptical friends, though, would eventually come round: by July 1886



Edward Gardner

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Billroth could describe the ‘special allure’⁸ that the finale held for him:

what others thereby call contrapuntal art is for me the outflowing of the very richest imagination.⁹

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One of the world’s oldest orchestras, the **Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra**, a Norwegian National Orchestra, dates back to 1765. Edvard Grieg had a close relationship with the Orchestra, serving as its artistic director from 1880 to 1882. Edward Gardner was Chief Conductor from 2015 to August 2024 and is now Honorary Conductor. He has taken the Orchestra on multiple international tours. These have included appearances at the Concertgebouw, in Amsterdam, Elbphilharmonie, in Hamburg, Konzerthaus Berlin, Edinburgh International Festival, Southbank Centre, and BBC Proms. Previous international tours have included performances at the Wiener Musikverein and Konzerthaus, Carnegie Hall, in New York, and Philharmonie Berlin. Sir Mark Elder is

⁸besondere Anziehungskraft

⁹ Was andere dabei kontrapunktische Kunst nennen, ist für mich der Ausfluß der allerreichsten Phantasie.

the Orchestra’s Principal Guest Conductor, and Jan Willem de Vriend holds the position of Artistic Partner.

In 2015 the Orchestra established its free streaming platform, Bergenphilive, which offers a great and extensive selection of live streams and works. The Bergen Philharmonic Youth Orchestra was established the same year.

The Orchestra has an active recording schedule, at the moment releasing four CDs every year. Critics worldwide applaud its energetic playing style and full-bodied string sound. Recording projects include Messiaen’s *Turangalila-Symphonie*, ballets by Stravinsky, the symphonies, ballet suites, and concertos by Prokofiev, and the complete orchestral music of Edvard Grieg. Enjoying long-standing artistic partnerships with some of the finest musicians in the world, the Orchestra has recorded with Leif Ove Andsnes, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet, James Ehnes, Mari Eriksmoen, Gerald Finley, Alban Gerhardt, Vadim Gluzman, Stephen Hough, Sara Jakubiak, Freddy Kempf, Truls Mørk, Steven Osborne, Lawrence Power, and Stuart Skelton, among others.

The Orchestra has recorded Tchaikovsky’s ballets and critically acclaimed series of works by Johan Halvorsen and Johan Svendsen with

Neeme Järvi, orchestral works by Rimsky-Korsakov with Dmitri Kitayenko, and music by Berlioz, Delius, Elgar, Sibelius, and Vaughan Williams with Sir Andrew Davis.

The first collaboration on disc between Edward Gardner and the Orchestra was a recording of orchestral realisations by Luciano Berio. Among subsequent recordings with Edward Gardner are a critically acclaimed series devoted to orchestral works by Janáček, including a Grammy-nominated recording of his *Glagolitic Mass*, Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, orchestral songs by Sibelius with Gerald Finley as soloist, a disc of orchestral works by Bartók, the Piano Concerto and incidental music from *Peer Gynt* by Grieg, the *Grande Messe des morts* by Berlioz, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle* with John Relyea and Michelle DeYoung, Brahms's Symphonies Nos 1 and 3, Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande* and *Erwartung* with Sara Jakubiak, Britten's *Peter Grimes* with, among others, Stuart Skelton and Erin Wall, tone poems and other works by Sibelius with Lise Davidsen, orchestral songs by Britten and Canteloube with Mari Eriksmoen, and MANMADE with the saxophonist Marius Neset. The latest releases on Chandos are discs in a series of recordings of works by Carl Nielsen that include his Violin Concerto

with James Ehnes, Flute Concerto with Adam Walker, and Clarinet Concerto with Alessandro Carbonare, as well as recordings of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, with Johanna Wallroth and Brian Mulligan, and Strauss's *Salome*, with Malin Byström. The Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra received a nomination for Orchestra of the Year at the *Gramophone* Awards 2020. In 2021, *Peter Grimes* won the Orchestra two *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards: Opera Recording of the Year and Recording of the Year. www.harmonien.no / www.bergenphilive.no

Edward Gardner OBE is Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director of Den Norske Opera & Ballett. He additionally serves as Honorary Conductor of the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, following his tenure as Chief Conductor. In demand as a guest conductor, he has most recently worked with the Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, San Francisco Symphony, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Wiener Symphoniker, and Staatskapelle Berlin. He has also enjoyed return engagements with the Gewandhausorchester

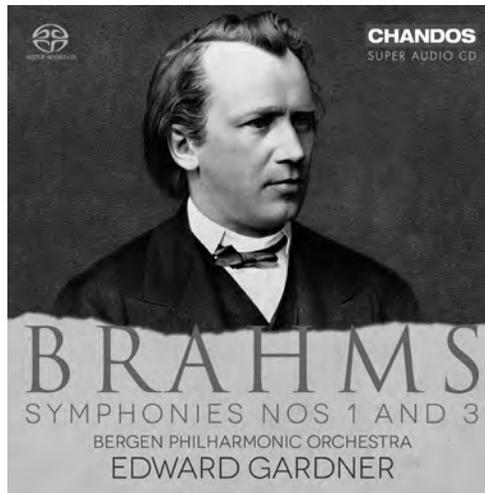
Leipzig, Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, and Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala di Milano. He has continued his longstanding collaborations with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, where he was Principal Guest Conductor from 2010 to 2016, and BBC Symphony Orchestra, whom he has conducted at both the First and the Last Night of the BBC Proms.

Music Director of English National Opera for eight years (2007 – 15), Edward Gardner built a strong relationship with The Metropolitan Opera, New York, where he has conducted productions of *La Damnation de Faust*, *Carmen*, *Don Giovanni*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, and *Werther*. In London, he has made appearances at The Royal Opera, Covent Garden: in 2019 in a new production of *Káťa Kabanová*, and in the following season conducting *Werther*. In the 2024 / 25 season, he conducted the world première of Mark-Anthony Turnage's *Festen*. During the 2021 / 22 season, he made his début with Bayerische Staatsoper, in a new

production of *Peter Grimes*, and returned in the 2022 / 23 season at short notice to conduct Verdi's *Otello*. Elsewhere, he has conducted at Teatro alla Scala, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, and Opéra national de Paris. A passionate supporter of young talent, he founded the Hallé Youth Orchestra, in 2002, and regularly conducts the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. He has a close relationship with The Juilliard School, and with the Royal Academy of Music which appointed him its inaugural Sir Charles Mackerras Conducting Chair in 2014.

Born in Gloucester, in 1974, Edward Gardner was educated at Cambridge and the Royal Academy of Music. He went on to become Assistant Conductor of The Hallé and Music Director of Glyndebourne Touring Opera. Among many accolades, he was named Conductor of the Year by the Royal Philharmonic Society in 2008, won an Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in Opera in 2009, and received an OBE for Services to Music in the Queen's Birthday Honours in 2012.

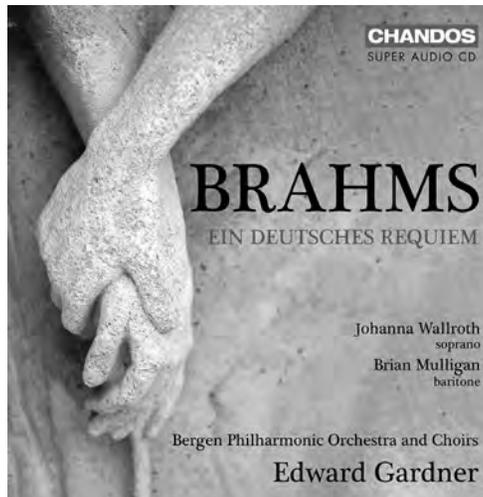
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Symphonies Nos 1 and 3
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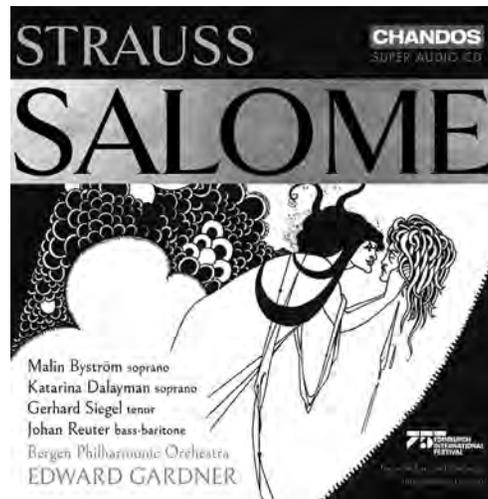
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Orchestra, at Grieghallen,
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BRAMHS: SYMPHONIES NOS 2 AND 4

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JOHANNES BRAHMS

(1833 - 1897)

1-4 SYMPHONY NO. 2, OP. 73 (1877) 40:59
IN D MAJOR • IN D-DUR • EN RÉ MAJEUR

5-8 SYMPHONY NO. 4, OP. 98 (1884-85) 40:25
IN E MINOR • IN E-MOLL • EN MI MINEUR

TT 81:24

BERGEN PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
ALEXANDER KAGAN LEADER
EDWARD GARDNER

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