

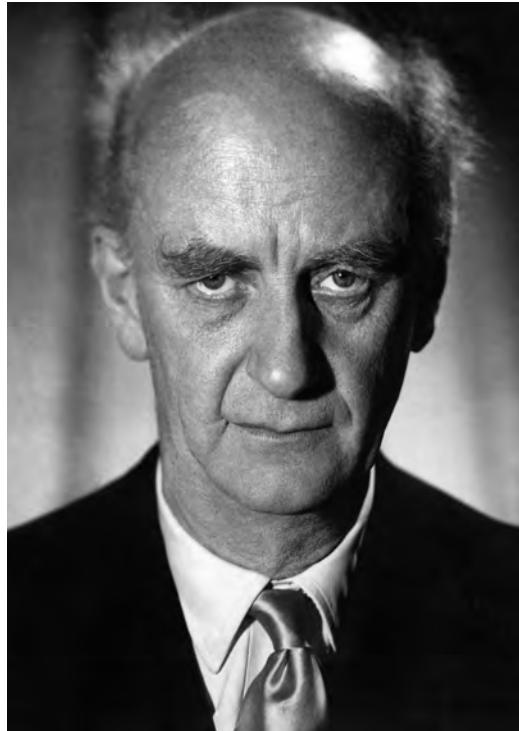


CHANDOS

**WILHELM
FURTWÄNGLER
SYMPHONY NO. 2**

ESTONIAN NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

NEEME JÄRVI



Photograph by Tita Binz / AKG Images, London / Ullstein Bild

Wilhelm Furtwängler, 1949

Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886 – 1954)

Symphony No. 2 (1945 – 46)

in E minor • in e-Moll • en mi mineur

- 1 1 Assai moderato (Ruhig beginnen) –
Allmählich belebend (bis Allegro) –
Von hier ab festes Tempo (Allegro) – (Molto allegro) –
Tempo des Anfangs – Allmählich breiter werden –
Immer langsamer werden –
Anfangstempo, noch nicht zu langsam –
Im Tempo des Anfangs, fließend – Allegro – [Allmählich vorwärts] –
(Allmählich noch fließender werden, bis molto Allegro) –
Molto Allegro (passionato) – Ruhiger werden –
Tranquillo [Im Tempo des Allegros] – Allegro 23:48

2	2	Andante semplice (Tranquillo) –	10:52
3	3	[Scherzo.] Un poco moderato – Più Allegro – Più moderato – Allegro – Tranquillo – Tempo I (Allegro) – Moderato – (Etwas ruhig) – In Tempo (Allegro) – Più lento (quasi Andante) – Tempo I	15:43
4	4	Langsam – Moderato andante – Allmählich vorwärts – Allegro molto (Festes Tempo) – Moderato – Etwas breit – Lento – Tempo des Anfangs – Breit – Langsam, wie zu Anfang – Moderato – Presto – Gehalten	23:13
			TT 73:45

Estonian National Symphony Orchestra

Triin Ruubel leader

Neeme Järvi



Raigo Pajula

Neeme Järvi, with the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra

Wilhelm Furtwängler: Symphony No. 2 in E minor

For some, Wilhelm Furtwängler (1886 – 1954) was simply the greatest conductor the twentieth century ever produced. Amongst his admirers, his interpretations of Beethoven, Brahms, Wagner, and Bruckner enjoy something like sacred status. But for Furtwängler himself, conducting was initially a means to an end, and it is not certain that he ever became completely reconciled to it as the sole focus of his reputation. As a young man, Furtwängler saw himself foremost as a composer; initially, he took up the baton partly to provide himself with a living but also to champion his own music. In that he was unsuccessful: critics were generally unenthusiastic and there were no audience ovations, nor were there the kinds of adverse reaction that can give a young creative artist the consolation of believing that he is a 'prophet without honour'.

Eventually, Furtwängler transferred his energies into conducting, earning a controversial reputation for the kind of interpretation in which the music is not so much realised as recreated – a marked contrast to his determinedly objective contemporary Arturo Toscanini. As the British critic Neville Cardus put it:

[Furtwängler] did not regard the printed notes of the score as a final statement, but rather as so many symbols of an imaginative conception, ever changing and always to be felt and realised subjectively.

His attitude to the score was rather like that of the poet George Herbert to holy writ:

A man that looks on glass,
On it may stay his eye;
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,
And then the heav'n espy.

It is an attitude that has been praised as visionary and denounced as interventionist; but on one thing both the pro- and anti-Furtwängler camps seem to be agreed: his approach was nearer to that of a composer than of a literalist time-beater.

Although actual composing tailed off for Furtwängler after the *Te Deum*, of 1902–06, it began to return in earnest in the mid-1930s – in other words, at exactly the time when cultural and political life in Germany was becoming dangerous, and when Furtwängler's own position was looking increasingly precarious. The colossal Piano Quintet – his first major work since the *Te Deum* – appeared in 1935, the year

following the 'Hindemith Affair'¹ which arose when, despite the fact that Paul Hindemith had been labelled a 'degenerate artist'² by the Nazis, Furtwängler conducted the première of the symphony based on Hindemith's banned opera *Mathis der Maler* (Mathis the Painter). He had then followed it up with a newspaper article defending the composer, provoking stern official rebuke and, eventually, his forced resignation from all artistic positions.

Granted, the idea for the Piano Quintet seems to have occurred to Furtwängler around 1912, and he had been toying with it intermittently ever since; but it seems to have been the Hindemith Affair that stimulated him to finish it. And having done so, Furtwängler went on to produce two violin sonatas (1935 and 1939), both well over fifty minutes in duration, and four immense orchestral works: the Symphonic Concerto (1937) and three symphonies (1941, 1945–46, and 1954). This artistic outpouring – all the more remarkable given how busy Furtwängler's conducting schedule was for much of this time – might possibly have happened under other circumstances, but the likelihood is that, as in the case of many other creative people in times of crisis, composition became a place

of refuge. When Furtwängler conducted, the eyes of the Nazi regime were on him, monitoring his actions, comments, even his gestures; when he composed, he was safe – for the moment at least.

Psychologically, he would have needed that safe space. Never a Nazi-sympathiser, Furtwängler had been so disturbed by the fallout from the Hindemith Affair that he attempted to leave Germany towards the end of 1934, but the Nazi authorities prevented him. Joseph Goebbels then informed him personally that if he left the Reich he would never be allowed to return. This would have meant separation from his children and his adored mother, which he simply could not countenance. But there was something else – something harder for modern readers to understand, but important nevertheless. Like many cultivated Germans, Furtwängler had a quasi-religious reverence for the German humanist artistic and intellectual tradition – not just its composers, but also its great thinkers: Goethe, Kant, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche. Strikingly, this was an attitude shared by large numbers of German-speaking Jews: Mahler's Eighth Symphony (1906–07) is much more than a hymn to Goethe's *Ewig-Weibliche* (Eternal Feminine); it is a song of praise to higher German culture, beginning with a setting of the hymn 'Veni

¹ Der Fall Hindemith

² entarteter Künstler

Creator Spiritus' (Come, Creator Spirit), by the mediaeval Archbishop of Mainz, Hrabanus Maurus, known as 'Praeceptor Germaniae' – 'Teacher' or, more loosely, 'Founding-Father of Germany'. The Eighth Symphony's knockout success at its Munich première, in 1910, was an indication of how timely that message was felt to be in the German-speaking world.

Devotion to that culture, and the conviction that it needed to be preserved and affirmed at a time when malign forces were appropriating it for their own terrible ends, was undoubtedly a decisive influence on Furtwängler's subsequent course of action. In marked contrast to the case of another emblematic figure of German artistic life at that time, the novelist Thomas Mann, disgust at what he witnessed (he is reported to have been horrified by the events of Kristallnacht) never compelled Furtwängler to reject Hans Sachs's 'Holy German Art'³ in favour of the notion of universal human culture. Combined with his determination to protect the Jewish musicians in his orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, this would have been enough to enable Furtwängler to tell himself that he was at least trying to do the decent thing. But it was a vertiginous course. The very fact that he remained in

his position, despite outspoken criticism of the regime and of Hitler himself, meant that the Nazis were able to use him as a powerful propaganda tool: here was a leading German artistic figure, admired throughout the world, who was stoutly advocating 'Germany' at a time when not only the country but even its greatest artists and thinkers were being denounced internationally as profoundly complicit in atrocity. Furtwängler certainly did some good, particularly for the Jews whose lives he helped save; but whether that was enough to counterbalance the evil, however unintentional, remains hotly debated.

Towards the end of the war, things grew more difficult still for Furtwängler. Despite his being included in the *Gottbegnadeten Liste* – the list of 'God-Given Talents' essential to National Socialist Culture – in September 1944, it was clearly believed that he had pushed back against the regime too much. As the war effort collapsed, the Nazis turned their attention towards anyone who they felt might have helped weaken the cause, or to anyone just thought to be too 'liberal'. In his diary for 1944, Goebbels had already noted pointedly that, not only was Furtwängler not a Nazi, he had completely failed to adjust his attitude to the Party and its actions. Tipped off that he was about to be arrested by the Gestapo, Furtwängler fled to Switzerland

³ Heilige deutsche Kunst

after a concert with the Vienna Philharmonic, in January 1945. It was there that he began to work on the score for which he is best known today, the Second Symphony.

The fact that Furtwängler returned to composition so soon after fleeing the Third Reich is revealing. Is this then the kind of work which, in Hamlet's telling image, holds 'a mirror up to nature: to show... the very age and body of the time his form and pressure'? The answer would appear to be, yes and no. For all its unusual length, the Second Symphony can give the impression of a near-seamless melodic outpouring. In that respect it resembles a major contemporary work, Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen*, for twenty-three solo strings (1944–45), written under the influence of powerful emotion following the Allied destruction of Munich, Dresden, and Weimar – for which Strauss ultimately blamed the Nazis. A similar sense of desolation can be felt at the beginning of Furtwängler's Second Symphony, possibly in the lugubrious low wind figures at the start, certainly in the descending six-note violin motif that follows. It is from this lamenting falling motif that several of the symphony's subsequent ideas derive, most notably the more hopeful major-key theme borne aloft at the very end.

But impassioned, driven, fundamentally seamless linear thinking had long been a

characteristic of the conductor Furtwängler. In his hands, the first movement of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony could give the impression of continuous striving and aspiring melody, despite the many dramatic shifts and dislocations along the way. Motif and development, brilliantly highlighted in Toscanini's performances, were backstage business for Furtwängler. What *is* striking here, more than in the case of Strauss's lament for strings, is how backward-looking the music often sounds, right through to its bizarrely nineteenth-century formulaic ending (sustained drumroll and repeated *fortissimo* tonic chords). One would never guess that this was music by the conductor who had given world premières of works by Bartók, Schoenberg, and Hindemith; the harmonic language seems mostly to belong to the pre-World War One era, without even the expressionism of the later Mahler. And despite the occasional superficial resemblance to Bruckner, whom Furtwängler revered, there is none of the Austrian composer's block-like architectural thinking. The expressive line leads, directs the flow of the music, throughout.

This is so much the case that the formal outlines of the four movements are not always easy to follow. The first movement is, in fact, a gigantic, sprawling sonata form,

the second broadly a song form (A – B – A) slow movement; the third eventually defines itself as a 4/4 scherzo with trio (the title 'Scherzo' is lacking, but it is identified in the 'attacca' instruction at the end of the *Andante semplice*); then the finale is an episodic *Moderato*, during which the chorale-like brass theme at the beginning returns regularly to stoke up tension. Does the end result equal the accomplishment of any of the great composers whom Furtwängler conducted with such urgent eloquence? Perhaps not; but it is still remarkable how compelling this music can be in an understanding performance. The themes may not be as distinctive and memorable as those of Beethoven, Brahms, or Bruckner, but the linear engineering is strong and impressively sustained. Surrender to it, and the symphony seems to be over in considerably less than the typical eighty minutes. As one follows the journey from the mournful first phrase right through to the (provisionally) triumphant ending, a sense emerges that composing the Second Symphony was a spiritual lifeline for Wilhelm Furtwängler. If a performance of it does manage to communicate that to us, the work is an achievement worth celebrating.

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The Estonian National Symphony Orchestra (Eesti Riiklik Sümfooniaorkester, ERSO) is an energetic and versatile orchestra always striving towards excellence. Occupying a unique position in the intersection of cultures, it brings together Nordic, western, and Russian musical traditions. The Orchestra, which will celebrate its one hundredth anniversary in 2026, has become the most prominent orchestral ambassador of Estonia, powerfully increasing its international scope, particularly in recent decades. Since the 2020/21 season, its Chief Conductor and Artistic Director has been Olari Elts. Neeme Järvi, its longest-serving chief conductor, continues his association with the Orchestra, now as Honorary Artistic Director for Life, while Paavo Järvi serves as its Artistic Adviser. The Orchestra performs with renowned conductors and soloists from around the world, including, of course, most prominent Estonian musicians. Commanding a repertoire that ranges from the baroque period to the present day, it has premièred symphonic works by numerous Estonian composers, including Arvo Pärt, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Jüri Reinvere, and Eduard Tubin.

Based at the Estonia Concert Hall, in Tallinn, the Orchestra has dazzled the world by undertaking numerous tours and making appearances at renowned international

music festivals. It has performed in such prestigious venues as the Konzerthaus Berlin, Wiener Musikverein, Rudolfinum, Prague, Brucknerhaus Linz, Avery Fisher Hall (now David Geffen Hall), New York, Grand Hall of the Saint Petersburg Philharmonia and the Concert Hall of the Mariinsky Theatre, Kölner Philharmonie, Helsinki Music Centre, and Berwaldhallen, Stockholm. On the festival circuit, it most recently visited the Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier, with Neeme Järvi, and Eufonie International Festival of Central and Eastern Europe, Warsaw, with Olari Elts. Recent highlights include a concert tour, in 2022, with Olari Elts and the violinist Daniel Lozakovich, which took the Orchestra to the Isarphilharmonie, in Munich, La Seine Musicale, in Paris, and Meistersingerhalle, in Nuremberg. Another successful tour took place in 2023, in Great Britain, involving eleven concerts with the pianist Barry Douglas under the baton of Olari Elts.

The Estonian National Symphony Orchestra has enjoyed fruitful collaborations with highly acclaimed record companies, its CDs demonstrating a quality that has been recognised by renowned music magazines and won the Orchestra several prizes, including a Grammy Award for a disc of cantatas by Sibelius. The Orchestra's concerts have been broadcast by local radio

and television as well as by Mezzo TV and medici.tv, and have reached millions of radio listeners via the European Broadcasting Union. In 2020, the Orchestra launched its own channel, erso.tv.

The head of a musical dynasty, **Neeme Järvi** is one of today's most esteemed maestros. He conducts the world's most prominent orchestras and works alongside soloists of the highest calibre. Over his long and highly successful career he has held chief conductor positions across the world with orchestras such as the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, among others. He is currently Honorary Artistic Director for Life of the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Emeritus of both the Residentie Orchestra The Hague and Detroit Symphony Orchestra. He also holds the titles of Principal Conductor Emeritus of the Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra and Conductor Laureate of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He spent three summers between 2013 and 2016 as Head of Conducting and Artistic Advisor of the Gstaad Conducting Academy. Among recent and future appearances are engagements with European orchestras such as the

Berliner Philharmoniker, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Orchestre national de France, and Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, as well as major orchestras in the USA and Asia. In November 2023 he conducted a highly successful tour of China, which was widely acclaimed.

A prolific recording artist, Neeme Järvi has amassed a discography of nearly 500 recordings. He has been a star recording artist with Chandos Records for over thirty years, his most recent releases, with orchestras such as the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Estonian National Symphony Orchestra, Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra, and Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, including discs of the three full-length ballets of Tchaikovsky and works by Joachim Raff, Kurt Atterberg, Saint-Saëns, and Martinů. Whilst highlights of his extensive discography for international record companies include

critically acclaimed complete cycles of works by many of the great composers, he has also championed less widely known composers such as Wilhelm Stenhammar, Hugo Alfvén, and Niels W. Gade, as well as composers from his native Estonia, including Rudolf Tobias and Arvo Pärt. In September 2018 he received the Lifetime Achievement Award of the magazine *Gramophone*.

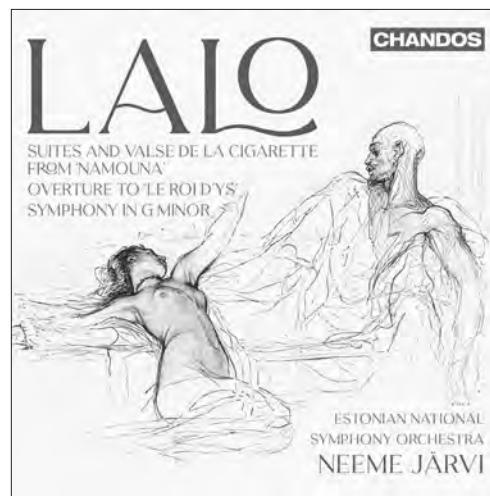
Neeme Järvi has been honoured with many international prizes and accolades. Named as one of the 'Estonians of the Century', he holds various awards from his native country, including an honorary doctorate from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn, and honorary doctorates from Wayne State University in Detroit, the universities of Michigan and Aberdeen, and the Royal Swedish Academy of Music. He has also been appointed Commander of the North Star Order by King Karl XVI Gustaf of Sweden.



Photographer unknown

Neeme Järvi, at the Wiener Musikverein

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WILHELM
FURTWÄNGLER
(1886–1954)

1-4 **SYMPHONY NO. 2** (1945–46)
in E minor · in e-Moll · en mi mineur

TT 73:45

Estonian National Symphony Orchestra
Triin Ruubel leader
Neeme Järvi



Recorded live in the Estonia Concert
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