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## Chamber Symphony No. 2, op. 38



Title	Chamber Symphony No. 2, op. 38
Time of Origin	1906–1908/1939
Premiere	15 December 1940, New York, Carnegie Hall
Duration	ca. 20 min.

I. Adagio

II. Con fuoco

"I have been working on the Second Chamber Symphony for a month now. I spend most of the time trying to understand: 'what was the composer trying to say?' My style has deepened in the meantime, and I have trouble reconciling what I justifiably wrote down at the time, trusting in my sense of form, and without much thought, with my far-reaching demands for 'visible logic'." (Schönberg to Fritz Stiedry, autumn 1939)

Schönberg started composing the Second Chamber Symphony only a few days after finishing the Chamber Symphony, op. 9. Begun in Rottach-Egern am Tegernsee in early August 1906, it was finally completed in 1939, after many interruptions, and assigned the opus number 38. With the First Chamber Symphony, Schönberg had explored new possibilities both in terms of his use of musical material and regarding the concept of a single-movement form with internal, latent multi-movement elements embracing aspects of both sonata form and sonata cycle. Multidimensional formal thinking, an overabundance of motivic and thematic material, and a complex harmonic system (combining tonal, whole-tone, and quartal harmonies) reveal in op. 9 the multiplicity of perspective that represents the "turning point" in the composer's artistic development: the aversion to late-romantic orchestral sound and the ensuing 'emancipation of dissonance.' "I believed I had found ways of building and carrying out understandable, characteristic, original, and expressive themes and melodies, in spite of the enriched harmony which we had inherited from Wagner. It was as lovely a dream as it was a disappointing illusion. I had started a Second Chamber Symphony. But after having composed almost two movements, that is, about half of the whole work, I was inspired by poems of Stefan George, the German poet, to compose music to some of his poems and [...] these songs showed a style quite different from everything I had written before." ("How one becomes lonely," 1937)

After a brief period of composition during the summer of 1907, work on the Chamber Symphony ceased for several years and resumed in November 1911 in Berlin, where Schönberg was lecturing at the Stern Conservatory. Another hiatus of several years passed before he returned to the manuscript in late 1916, drafting a program for it entitled "Turning Point." Its melodramatic text consists of a description of ambivalent feelings: every ending is followed by a new beginning characterized by an optimistic

outlook whose impulse derives from the prior experience of desperation and sorrow. Spiritual disorientation evolves into trust in a (happy) turning point.

It was not until Schönberg was commissioned to compose a piece by the New Friends of Music in 1939 (Schönberg had emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1933 and was teaching at the University of California in Los Angeles) that he returned again to the two fragmentary movements of the chamber symphony, a "disturbing skeleton in his musical closet." (Glenn Gould)

It was Fritz Stiedry who provided the main impetus for the composer to finish the work. Stiedry had already conducted the world premiere of Schönberg's opera "Die glückliche Hand" in Vienna in 1924; now, referencing Bruckner's First Symphony and Verdi's "Simon Boccanegra," he reminded Schönberg that there was no lack in the history of music of early works finished in later years. Shortly afterwards, Schönberg reported that the first movement was finished, and that it was "easy to play, incidentally: very easy." He was unable to write a third movement in the form of a heroic Maestoso, and added the E-flat minor epilog he had intended for it to the second movement. Op. 38 remained (in)complete in two movements: "The musical and 'psychical' problems are exhaustively presented in the two complete movements," Schönberg noted with an indirect reference to the program of 1916. In a letter to Fritz Stiedry (who had conducted the "completed torso" in New York on December 14, 1940, in a concert that also featured Bach's First and Fourth Brandenburg Concertos), Schönberg offers insight into the musical realization: "The conception was generally compelling, but it suffered greatly by the tempi being too slow, some of them far too slow. In measure 219, for example, the Animando (and likewise in all parallel passages) of course means "schwungvoll" in German." [...] I feel it is important to correct everything for future performances." (January 8, 1941) In the early 1930s - about 10 years after he had developed a "method of composing with 12 tones related only to one another" and composed a series of works of various types using that method - Schönberg again wrote a tonal composition: the chorus "Verbundenheit", which was soon followed by the Suite for String Orchestra in G major. Other tonally oriented works ensued during the years of American exile between 1936 and 1943, including the Second Chamber Symphony, op. 38, a work filled with relationships of densely textured triadic forms. The first movement, with its large share of harmonic parallelisms and chromatic sequences, yields a "certain tonal ennui." (Glenn Gould) In the sections written in 1939 (especially the E-flat minor epilog in the second movement), the motivic and rhythmic texture is more sharply emphasized in comparison to the sketches. "A longing to return to the older style was always vigorous in me; and from time to time I had to yield to that urge. This is how and why I sometimes write tonal music. To me stylistic differences of this nature are not of special importance. I do not know which of my compositions are better; I like them all, because I liked them when I wrote them." (Schönberg, "On revient toujours," 1948)