

London Philharmonic Orchestra

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 9

VLADIMIR JUROWSKI conductor
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA



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GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)

SYMPHONY NO. 9

- 1 Andante comodo
- 2 Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb
- 3 Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig
- 4 Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend

Although the Ninth Symphony occupied Mahler intermittently between 1908 and 1911, he wrote most of the work in the summer of 1909, when he took his annual composing holiday in the Dolomites. Two years earlier, he had been prostrated by the death of his elder daughter at the age of four; since then, his own serious heart condition had been diagnosed, and he had had to modify his strenuous way of life. After many years of struggle, he had resigned as music director of the Vienna Opera; during 1908 he had been conducting at the Metropolitan Opera in New York; in the autumn of 1909 he was also to take up a new contract as conductor of the New York Philharmonic. The following summer, after his first New York season, he began sketching his Tenth Symphony, but that was to remain in draft form on his death in May 1911: so the Ninth was his last completed symphony. Its first performance took place in Vienna in June 1912, under the direction of Mahler's younger colleague Bruno Walter.

The Symphony is scored for a large orchestra, especially numerous in the woodwind section (with a total of 20 players), but without any of the unusual extra instruments that had found a place in Mahler's previous two symphonies. As in all his music, the scoring is fastidiously detailed; there are remarkably few *tuttis* (passages for the full orchestra), and there are some moments of extraordinary bareness, using the extreme high and low registers with nothing in the middle. The treatment of tonality is very free, with episodes firmly rooted in a key alternating with episodes in which the key-centre shifts constantly, and with one of Mahler's typical 'progressive' key-schemes, beginning in one key and ending in another.

As for the overall shape of the work, it is unconventional: a very long opening movement which fluctuates in tempo but is essentially slow; a central pair of scherzo-like movements, the first in 3/4 dance rhythms and

the second in duple time; and a long, slow finale. This outline has been compared to that of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony of 1893. But there are also precedents for slow closing movements in Mahler's own music, in the final *Adagio* of the Third Symphony, and in 'Der Abschied', the prolonged farewell to life that closes Mahler's previous work before the Ninth, the song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*.

The opening movement of the Ninth Symphony begins (at an 'easy walking pace') in the spare, bleak mood of 'Der Abschied', with a four-note harp motif and little rocking string figures ushering in a halting, sorrowing violin melody. This is followed shortly by the first appearance of the main contrasting idea, a more despairing melody in the minor key; this later returns in a more animated version, arriving at brass fanfares which mark the end of the opening section. The development begins with a syncopated rhythm in the horns which may suggest Mahler's irregular heartbeat, and the return of the four-note motif. Rondo-like restatements of the first theme, in varied forms but in its original key, alternate with vehement episodes working up to two powerful climaxes. In the wake of the second of these, the faltering heart rhythm returns on strident trombones, and the harp ostinato also returns on timpani

with the steady tread of a funeral march. This passage leads directly to a varied reprise of the main themes, followed by a coda which dies away to nothing.

This first movement frequently hints at a three-note descending horn-call figure borrowed from Beethoven's piano sonata 'Les Adieux', in which it represents the word *Lebewohl* ('farewell'), addressed to a friend who was leaving Vienna. And a recurring variant of the first subject brings its melodic shape very close to that of a Viennese waltz by Johann Strauss the younger, called *Freut euch des Lebens* ('Enjoy life'). These references suggest that Mahler was taking his leave, if not yet of life, then of the city that had played such a big part in his career. And this is all but confirmed by the two central movements. The second movement is a scherzo in the 'easygoing' Austrian dance rhythm of the Ländler, with two more volatile trio sections also in the time of the Ländler or its city cousin, the waltz: the treatment is sometimes deadpan, sometimes affectionate, and sometimes deliberately banal.

The *Rondo-Burleske* third movement is reliably reported to have been headed at one stage with a dedication 'to my brothers in Apollo', clearly meaning the fellow members of the musical profession who had made

Mahler's career in Vienna so uncomfortable. It is an exercise in rough-hewn, un-academic counterpoint on brusque, constantly evolving melodic motifs; towards the end, there is an extended episode of visionary calm, in D major, the key of the first movement, but this is gradually overcome by the earlier material, and the ending is savage.

The very slow finale is in D flat major, a semitone lower than the initial key. It has a warmly sustained, hymn-like main theme which is varied and developed on its two subsequent reappearances; these statements alternate with two subsidiary episodes in C sharp minor, the second of them beginning with an allusion to a gentle rocking figure from 'Der Abschied' and reaching a despairing climax. The hymn-like main melody not only incorporates the 'Lebewohl' motif but also gradually absorbs fragments from the bitterly parodistic *Rondo-Burleske*: a potent musical metaphor for a kind of psychological healing process, a reintegration of a damaged personality. And there is a further symbolic gesture in the coda, a high violin line which quotes from Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* ('Songs on the Death of Children'), which he had written some years before the death of his daughter. This leads to an ending that is not disturbed but deeply peaceful – suggesting that the

composer has won his way to a state of mind in which he can contemplate the frustrations and tragedies of his life, and even the inevitability of his own death, in a mood of calm acceptance.

Programme note © Anthony Burton



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VLADIMIR JUROWSKI CONDUCTOR



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Vladimir Jurowski is one of today's most sought-after conductors, acclaimed worldwide for his incisive musicianship and adventurous artistic commitment.

He became the London Philharmonic Orchestra's Conductor Emeritus in 2021, following 14 years as Principal Conductor, during which his creative energy and artistic rigour were central to the Orchestra's success. In 2024 he was appointed a KBE by His Majesty King Charles III, in recognition of his services to music and the arts. At the BBC Proms concert with the LPO on 12 August 2021 – his final concert as

Principal Conductor – he received the Royal Philharmonic Society Gold Medal, one of the highest international honours in music.

In 2021 Vladimir became Music Director at the Bavarian State Opera in Munich. Since 2017 he has been Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra. He is also Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and in 2021 stepped down from his decade as Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra to become its Honorary Conductor. In addition, he is Principal Artist of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, and has held the positions of Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera (2001–13), Artistic Director of the Russian State Academic Symphony Orchestra (2010–20), Principal Guest Conductor of the Russian National Orchestra (2005–09) and Artistic Director of the George Enescu International Festival, Bucharest (2017–21). He also previously held the positions of First Kapellmeister of the Komische Oper Berlin (1997–2000), and Principal Guest Conductor of the Teatro Comunale di Bologna (2000–03).

LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trailblazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. In September 2021 Edward Gardner became the Orchestra's Principal Conductor, succeeding Vladimir Jurowski, who became Conductor Emeritus in recognition of his transformative impact on the Orchestra as Principal Conductor from 2007–21.

The Orchestra is based at the Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for 60 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including those with LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti, Tennstedt and Masur, to Jurowski and Gardner.

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