



MAHLER

Das Lied von der Erde

Ruxandra Donose

Thomas Harper

National Symphony Orchestra
of Ireland

Michael Halász

Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth)

**Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde
(The Drinking-Song of the Earth's Sorrow)**

Der Einsame im Herbst (The Lonely One in Autumn)

Von der Jugend (Of Youth)

Von der Schönheit (Of Beauty)

Der Trunkene im Frühling (The Drunkard in Spring)

Der Abschied (The Farewell)

The great Viennese symphonic tradition found worthy successors in two composers of very different temperament and background, Anton Bruckner and Gustav Mahler. The latter, indeed, extended the form in an extraordinary way that has had a far-reaching effect on the course of Western music, among other things creating a symphonic form that included in it the tradition of German song in a varied tapestry of sound particularly apt for a twentieth century that has found in Mahler's work a reflection of its own joys and sorrows.

Mahler was to express succinctly enough his position in the world. He saw himself as three times homeless, a native of Bohemia in Austria, an Austrian among Germans and a Jew throughout the whole world. The second child, and the first of fourteen to survive, he was born in Kaliste in Bohemia in 1860. Soon after his birth his family moved to Jihlava, where his father, by his own very considerable efforts, had raised himself from being little more than a pedlar, with a desire for intellectual self-improvement, to the running of a tavern and distillery. Mahler's musical abilities were developed first in Jihlava, before a brief period of schooling in Prague, which ended unhappily, and a later course of study at the Conservatory in Vienna, where he turned from the piano to composition and, as a necessary corollary, to conducting.

It was as a conductor that Mahler made his career, at first at a series of provincial opera-houses, then in Prague, Budapest and Hamburg, before moving to a position of the highest distinction of all, when, in 1897, he became Kapellmeister of the Vienna Court Opera, two months after his baptism as a Catholic, a necessary preliminary. In Vienna he effected significant reforms in the Court Opera, but made enough enemies, particularly represented in the anti-semitic press, to lead to his resignation in 1907, followed by a final period conducting in America and elsewhere, in a vain attempt to secure his family's future before his own imminent death, which took place a week after his final return to Vienna, on 18th May, 1911.

Although his career as a conductor involved him most closely with opera, Mahler attempted little composition in this field. His work as a composer consists chiefly of his songs and of his ten symphonies, the last left unfinished at his death, together with his monumental setting of poems from the Chinese in *Das Lied von der Erde*. The greater part of his music was written during summer holidays away from the business of the opera-house, a miraculous achievement in view of his other obligations.

The year of 1907 brought Mahler troubles greater than those posed by his resignation from the Court Opera. During the summer, spent as usual at Maiernigg, the elder of his two daughters caught scarlet fever and died. The mother of his wife Alma, who was visiting the family, had a heart-attack and the doctor called in to treat her also found weaknesses in Alma's heart and advised rest. Almost in jest, Mahler suggested that the doctor should test his heart. The result was the diagnosis of a dangerous weakness of the heart and the immediate advice to restrict all physical activity. Superstition had, since the time of Beethoven, composer of nine completed symphonies, suggested the association of the ninth symphony of any composer as possibly his last. Mahler's illness and the necessity of continued work as a conductor, now particularly in New York at the Metropolitan Opera and with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, led Mahler to regard his last major works, a ninth and tenth

symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde* as his farewell to the world. In the event the *Tenth Symphony* was never finished and he never heard performances of either of the other two works.

Mahler sketched *Das Lied von der Erde* during the summer months of 1908, spent at Alt-Schluderbach, near Toblach in the South Tyrol, after his first season at the Metropolitan. The work was scored in the following year, but had its first performance only after Mahler's death, when Bruno Walter directed it in Munich on 20th November 1911. *Das Lied* sets six poems taken from Hans Bethge's fashionable collection of translations of Chinese or supposedly Chinese poems, *Die chinesische Flöte*. The German versions of Bethge relied on translations, very probably, indeed, on German versions of French translations from the Chinese and in one case at least on a German version of a fabricated pseudo-Chinese poem by Judith Gautier.

Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde (Drinking-Song of the Sorrow of the Earth) sets Bethge's version of a poem by the Tang dynasty poet Li Be (Li Tai Po). The four horns of the orchestra announce the opening motif, followed by strings and woodwind before the tenor enters, with his song of sorrow, of the darkness of life and of death (*Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod*). The four stanzas set contrast the command to drink with the inevitable death that lies ahead. The poetic structure is echoed in the music.

The second song, *Der Einsame im Herbst*, apparently based on German versions of a chinoiserie poem by Judith Gautier, opens gently with an accompaniment figure played by muted first violins, above which the oboe enters. Second violins join the first and horns and clarinets are heard, followed by other instruments in scoring that remains translucent. The contralto enters with the descending melodic line of *Herbstnebel wallen bläulich überm See* (The mist of autumn passes blue over the lake). The solitary voice of the singer laments the changes of autumn, the fading of the flowers, weariness with life and loneliness, finally seeking the sun of love to dry her tears, in a tautly constructed song of melancholy.

Von der Jugend (Of Youth) changes at once to a more cheerful mood, with flutes and oboe weaving their sinuous line over the ringing tones of the French horn. The words set seem again derived from Gautier rather than from any Chinese original, although Bethge attributes the poem to Li Tai Po. The tenor enters, his melody shared with the piccolo, with the words *Mitten in dem kleinen Teiche / Steht ein Pavillon* (In the middle of the little pool / Stands a pavilion). Of the seven stanzas, the first two are echoed by the last two in an instrumental texture that suggests a romantic form of chinoiserie.

In *Von der Schönheit* (Of Beauty), its German words now an identifiable version of a poem by Li Be, flutes and violins, joined by the French horns, create a delicate opening texture. Music and words are of summer. Now *Junge Mädchen pflücken Blumen* (Young girls pluck flowers), the melody of the singer accompanied by pentatonic figuration from the woodwind. Trumpets and drums introduce a new element, as the boys are seen riding on the river-bank and a further marching passage leads to a description of the horses. Again the golden sun gilds their bodies, reflected in the water, and a girl feels the pain of love. The music and the beauty it echoes, fades away to nothing.

Der Trunkene im Frühling (The Drunkard in Spring), derived from Li Be, is a second drinking-song. Mahler, in his usual detailed instructions to the performers, suggests that the song should be *keck* (bold or pert). There are three bars of introduction before the tenor sings *Wenn nur ein Traum das Leben ist* (If life is only a dream, why labour and worry?). He is interrupted by a version of the opening horn motif, which returns in various forms as the music continues. The drunkard sleeps, and wakes again to the sound of the birds, joined now by a solo violin, telling him that spring has come. He drinks again and sleeps again, for what is spring to him?

The last movement, *Der Abschied* (The Farewell), joins poems by Meng Haoran and Wang Wei. Two friends bid each other farewell, but for Mahler this was clearly a farewell to the world, in a setting that is almost the length of all the other movements together. In an opening marked *Schwer*, the oboe is heard over the ringing notes of double bassoon, horn, harps, gong and lower strings. The contralto, *in erzählenden Ton, ohne Ausdruck* (relating the story, without expression), tells of the setting sun, *Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem Gebirge* (The sun departs behind the mountains), as the world takes its rest. This is the time for the *letzte Lebewohl* (The last farewell). There is a celebration of the beauty of the world, as the poet longs to be by the side of his friend. The second poem takes up the tale, as friends now part, the traveller riding to his homeland, from which he will never return: the dear earth is renewed in spring, everywhere and for ever shining blue and bright in the distance. The beauty of the world continues for ever, as the music dies away to nothing. *Der Abschied* brings death and parting, with the final acceptance of death.

Ruxandra Donose

The Romanian mezzo-soprano Ruxandra Donose was born in Bucharest in 1964 and studied the piano at the Enescu Conservatory in her native city, winning an award at the 1982 Vercelli Competition in Italy. The following year she began to study singing at the Bucharest Ciprian Porumbescu Academy of Music, a course of action leading to her present international career, which has brought engagements throughout Germany, at the Vienna State Opera, in Switzerland, Belgium and Norway and at the Salzburg Festival. She has an operatic repertoire ranging from Monteverdi to Enescu and a similarly wide concert and recital repertoire.

Thomas Harper

The American tenor Thomas Harper was born in Oklahoma but has made his home in Germany, where he is a member of the Dortmund Opera Theatre. In addition to a recent highly acclaimed American début as Mime in Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at the Seattle Opera, he has won enthusiastic praise for his recording of the rôle of Fritz in the Marco Polo recording of Franz Schreker's opera *Der ferne Klang*, a milestone in the current revival of operas by Schreker. In Italy, Switzerland and Germany Thomas Harper has amassed a wide and varied repertoire of some fifty rôles, ranging from the Duke in *Rigoletto* and Radames in *Aida* to Anton in Alban Berg's opera *Lulu* and Gregor in Janacek's *The Makropoulos Affair*. Other important rôles include that of Florestan in *Fidelio*, Erik in *Der fliegende Holländer* and the Witch in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*.

National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland

The RTE Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1947 as part of the Radio and Television service in Ireland. With its membership coming from France, Germany, Britain, Italy, Hungary, Poland and Russia, it drew together a rich blend of European culture. Apart from its many symphony concerts, the orchestra came to world-wide attention with its participation in the famous Wexford Opera Festival, an event broadcast in many parts of the world. The orchestra now enjoys the facilities of a fine new concert hall in central Dublin where it performs with the world's leading conductors and soloists. In 1990 the RTE Symphony Orchestra was augmented and renamed the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland, quickly establishing itself as one of Europe's most adventurous orchestras with programmes featuring many twentieth century compositions. The orchestra has now embarked upon an extensive recording project for the Naxos and Marco Polo labels and will record music by Nielsen, Tchaikovsky, Goldmark, Rachmaninov, Brian and Scriabin.

Michael Halász

Michael Halász's first engagement as a conductor was at the Munich Gärtnerplatz Theater, where, from 1972 to 1975, he directed all operetta productions. In 1975 he moved to Frankfurt as principal Kapellmeister under Christoph von Dohnányi, working with the most distinguished singers and conducting the most important works of the operatic repertoire. Engagements as a guest-conductor followed, and in 1977 Dohnányi took him to the Staatsoper in Hamburg as principal Kapellmeister. From 1978 to 1991 he was General Musical Director of the Hagen opera house and in 1991 he took up the post of Resident Conductor of the Vienna State Opera.

1 Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde

Schon winkt der Wein im gold'nen Pokale,
doch trinkt noch nicht, erst sing'ich euch ein Lied!
Das Lied vom Kummer soll auflachend in die Seele euch klingen.
Wenn der Kummer naht, liegen wüsst die Gärten der Seele,
welkt hin und stirbt die Freude, der Gesang.
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod.

Herr dieses Hauses!
Dein Keller birgt die Fülle des goldenen Weins!
Hier, diese Laute nenn'ich mein!
Die Laute schlagen und die Gläser leeren,
das sind die Dinge, die zusammen passen.
Ein voller Becher Weins zur rechten Zeit
ist mehr wert, als alle Reiche dieser Erde!

Das Firmament blaut ewig, und die Erde
wird lange fest steh'n und aufblüh'n im Lenz.
Du aber, Mensch, wie lang lebst denn du?
Nicht hundert Jahre darfst du dich ergötzen
an all dem morschen Tande dieser Erde!

Seht dort hinab! Im Mondschein auf den Gräbern
hockt eine wild-gespenstische Gestalt.
Ein Aff'ist's! Hört ihr, wie sein Heulen
hinausgellt in den süßen Duft des Lebens!

Jetzt nehmt den Wein! Jetzt ist es Zeit, Genossen!
Leert eure gold'nen Becher zu Grund!
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!

② Der Einsame im Herbst

Herbstnebel wallen bläulich überm See,
Vom Reif bezogen stehen alle Gräser;
Man meint, ein Künstler habe Staub von Jade
Über die feinen Blüten ausgestreut.

Der süße Duft der Blumen ist verflogen;
Ein kalter Wind beugt ihre Stengel nieder.
Bald werden die verwelkten, gold'nen Blätter
Die Lotosblüten auf dem Wasser zieh'n.

Mein Herz ist müde. Meine kleine Lampe
Erlosch mit Knistern, es gemahnt mich an den Schlaf.
Ich komm' zu dir, traute Ruhestätte!
Ja, gib mir Ruh', ich hab' Erquickung not!

Ich weine viel in meinen Einsamkeiten.
Der Herbst in meinem Herzen währt zu lange.
Sonne der Liebe, willst du nie mehr scheinen,
Um meine bittern Tränen mild aufzutrocknen?

③ Von der Jugend

Mitten in den kleinen Teiche
Steht ein Pavillon aus grünen
Und aus weißem Porzellan.

Wie der Rücken eines Tigers
Wölbt die Brücke sich aus Jade
Zu dem Pavillon hinüber.

In dem Häuschen sitzen Freunde,
Schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern.
Manche schreiben Verse nieder.

Ihre seidnen Ärmel gleiten
Rückwärts, ihre seidnen Mützen
Hocken lustig tief im Nacken.

Auf des kleinen Teiches stiller
Wasserfläche zeigt sich alles
Wunderlich im Spiegelbilde.

Alles auf dem Kopfe stehend
In dem Pavillon aus grünem
Und aus weißem Porzellan;

Wie ein Halbmond scheint die Brücke,
Umgekehrt der Bogen. Freunde,
Schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern.

4 Von der Schönheit

Junge Mädchen pflücken Blumen,
Pflücken Lotosblumen an dem Uferrande.
Zwischen Büschen und Blättern sitzen sie,
Sammeln Blüten in den Schoß und rufen
Sich einander Neckereien zu.

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
Spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Sonne spiegelt ihre schlanken Glieder,
Ihre süßen Augen wider,
Und der Zephyr hebt mit Schmeichelkosen
Das Gewebe ihrer Ärmel auf,
Führt den Zauber
Ihrer Wohlgerüche durch die Luft.

O sieh, was tummeln sich für schöne Knaben
Dort an dem Uferrand auf mut'gen Rossen,
Weithin glänzend wie die Sonnenstrahlen;
Schon zwischen dem Geäst der grünen Weiden

Trabt das jungfrische Volk einher!
Das Roß des einen wiehert fröhlich auf,
Und scheut, und saust dahin,
Über Blumen, Gräser wanken hin die Hufe,
Sie zerstampfen jäh im Sturm die hingesunk'nen Blüten.
Hei! Wie flattern im Tummel seine Mähnen,
Dampfen heiß die Nüstern!

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
Spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Und die schönste von den Jungfrau'n sendet
Lange Blicke ihm der Sehnsucht nach.
Ihre stolze Haltung ist nur Verstellung.
In dem Funkeln ihrer großen Augen,
In dem Dunkel ihres heißen Blicks
Schwingt klagend noch die Erregung ihres Herzens nach.

5 Der Trunkene im Frühling

Wenn nur ein Traum das Leben ist,
Warum denn Müh' und Plag'?
Ich trinke, bis ich nicht mehr kann,
Den ganzen lieben Tag!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr trinken kann,
Weil Kehl' und Seele voll,
So taumel' ich bis zu meiner Tür
Und schlafe wundervoll!

Was hör' ich beim Erwachen? Horch!
Ein Vogel singt im Baum.
Ich frag' ihn ob schon Frühling sei,
Mir ist als wie im Traum.

Der Vogel zwitschert: Ja!
Der Lenz ist da, sie kommen über Nacht!
Auf tiefstem Schauen lauscht'ich auf,
Der Vogel singt und lacht!

Ich fülle mir den Becher neu
Und leer'ihn bis zum Grund
Und singe, bis der Mond erglänzt
Am schwarzen Firmament!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr singen kann,
So schlaf'ich wieder ein.
Was geht mich denn Frühling an?
Laßt mich betrunken sein!

6 Der Abschied

Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem Gebirge.
In alle Täler steigt der Abend nieder
Mit seinen Schatten, die voll Kühlung sind.
O sieh! Wie eine Silberbarke schwebt
Der Mond am blauen Himmelssee herauf.
Ich spüre eines feinen Windes Weh'n
Hinter den dunklen Fichten!

Der Bach singt voller Wohllaut durch das Dunkel.
Die Blumen blassen im Dämmersein.
Die Erde atmet voll von Ruh'und Schlaf.
Alle Sehnsucht will nun Träumen,
Die müden Menschen geh'n heimwärts,
Um im Schlaf vergess'nes Glück
Und Jugen neu zu lernen!
Die Vögel hokken still in ihren Zweigen.
Der Welt schläft ein!

Es wehet kühl im Schatten miner Fichten.
Ich stehe hier und harre meines Freundes.
Ich harre sein zum letzten Lebewohl.
Ich sehne mich, o Freund, an deiner Seite
Die Schönheit dieses Abends zu genießen.
Wo bleibst du? du läßt mich lang allein!
Ich wandle auf und nieder mit meiner Laute
Auf Wegen, die von weichem Grase schwellen.
O Schönheit, o ewigen Liebens, Lebens trunk'ne Welt!

Er stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm den Trunk des Abschieds dar.
Er fragte ihn, wohin er führe
Und auch warum es müßte sein.
Er sprach, seine Stimme was umflort:
Du, mein Freund,
Mir war auf dieser Welt das Glück nicht hold!

Wohin ich geh'? Ich geh', ich wand're in die Berge.
Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam Herz!
Ich wandle nach der Heimat, meiner Stätte!
Ich werde niemals in die Ferne schweifen.
Still ist mein Herz und harret seiner Stunde!

Du liebe Erde überall
Blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu!
Allüberall und ewig blauen licht die Fernen,
Ewig . . ewig!

1 The Drinking-Song of the Earth's Sorrow

Now the wine in the golden goblet signs to me,
but do not drink yet, first I will sing you a song!
The song of sorrow shall sound with laughter in your soul.
If sorrow comes near, the garden of the soul lies waste,
Joy, song fade and die.
Dark is life, and so too death.

Lord of this house!
Your cellar is full of golden wine!
Here, this lute I call mine!
Playing the lute and emptying glasses
Are things that go together.
A full beaker of wine at the right time
Is worth more than all the riches of the earth!
Dark is life, and so too death.

The sky is ever blue, and the earth
Will long stand fast and blossom in spring.
But you, o man, how long then do you live?
You cannot for a hundred years enjoy
All the tainted trifles of this earth!

See down there! In the moonlight on the graves
A wild and ghostly figure squats.
It is an ape! Listen how he howls,
Yelling in the sweet fragrance of life!

Now take the wine! Now is the time, friends!
Empty your golden beakers to the bottom!
Dark is life, and so too death.

2 The Lonely One in Autumn

Autumn mist hangs blue over the lake,
All the grass stands covered in frost;
You would think an artist had cast jade-dust
Over the delicate flowers.

The sweet fragrance of the flowers has gone;
A cold wind bows down their stems.
Soon they will have faded, golden leaves
Of the lotus-flower lying on the water.

My heart is tired. My little lamp
Goes out with a crackle, it reminds me I should sleep.
I come to you, trusted state of rest!
Yes, give me rest, I need refreshment!

I weep much in my loneliness.
Autumn lingers too long in my heart.
Sun of love, will you never more shine,
Gently drying my bitter tears?

3 Of Youth

In the middle of the little pond
Stands a pavilion of green
And white porcelain.

Like the back of a tiger
The bridge of jade arches
Across to the pavilion.

In the little house sit friends,
Finely dressed, drinking, talking.
Many of them are writing verses.

Their silken sleeves move
Backwards, their silken caps
Rest happily back on their necks.

On the little pond's still
Water-surface everything shows
Wonderfully reflected.

Everything is standing on its head
In the pavilion of green
And white porcelain.

Like a half-moon the bridge seems,
Its arch inverted. Friends,
Finely dressed, drink, talk.

4 Of Beauty

Young girls are picking flowers
Picking lotus-flowers by the river-bank.
Among bushes and leaves they sit,
Gathering flowers in their laps and calling
To each other playfully.

Golden sun weaves about their figures,
Reflects them in the bright water.
The sun reflects their slender limbs,
Their sweet eyes,
And the Zephyr lifts, caressing,
The cloth of their sleeves,
Carries the magic
Of their fragrance through the air.

O see!, what handsome boys busy
There on the river-bank on their brave horses,
Shining far like the rays of the sun;
Between the branches of the green willows
The lively young people trot!

The horse of one of them joyfully neighs,
And shies, and dashes away,
Over flowers and grass his hooves go,
Trampling down suddenly the fallen flowers.
Hei! How his mane flutters out in ecstasy,
His nostrils hot and steaming!

Golden sun weaves about their figures,
Reflects them in the bright water.
And the fairest of the girls sends
Long looks of yearning after the boy.
Her proud bearing is only show.
In the sparkling of her large eyes,
In the darkness of her heated glance,
The stirring of her heart sways lamenting towards him.

⑤ The Drunkard in Spring

If life is only a dream,
Why then labour and worry?
I drink until I can drink no more,
The whole blessed day!

And if I can drink no more,
Since throat and soul are full,
I totter to my door
And sleep wonderfully!

What do I hear when I wake? Listen!
A bird is singing in the tree.
I ask him if the spring is coming,
It is like a dream to me.

The bird twitters: yes!
Spring is there, it came overnight!
In deepest wonder I listen,
The bird sings and laughs!

I fill my beaker again
And empty it to the bottom
And sing, until the moon shines
In the black sky!

And when I can sing no more,
I go to sleep again.
What then is spring to me?
Let me be drunk!

6 The Farewell

The sun sinks behind the mountains.
In all the valleys evening descends
With its shadows, that are so cool.
O see! Like a silver barque the moon
Sails through the blue sea of heaven.
I feel a fine breeze blowing
Behind the dark pine-trees.

The brook sings out aloud through the darkness.
The flowers turn pale in the twilight.
The earth breathes full of rest and sleep.
All yearning now is dreaming,
Weary men go homewards,
To learn anew
The forgotten joy of sleep and youth!
The birds roost silent on their branches.
The world is going to sleep!

It blows cool in the shadow of my pine-trees.
I stand here and await my friend.
I wait for his last farewell.
I long, my friend, by your side
To enjoy the beauty of this evening.
Where are you? You leave me so long alone!
I wander up and down with my lute
On the pathway that is covered with soft grass.
O beauty, o world drunk with eternal love and life!

He dismounted from his horse and handed him the farewell drink.
He asked him where he was going
And why, too, he must leave.
He spoke, his voice was low:
Ah, my friend
Fortune was not good to me in this world!

Where am I going? I go, I wander in the mountains.
I seek rest for my lonely heart!
I go to my home, my abode!
I shall never rove into the far distance.
My heart is still and awaits its hour!

The beloved earth everywhere
Is in flower in spring, green again!
Everywhere and for ever it shines blue in the distance
For ever . . . for ever!

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NAXOS



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STEREO

Gustav
MAHLER

(1860 - 1911)

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Ruxandra Donose • Thomas Harper
National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland
Michael Halász

DDD

Playing
Time:
58'34"

Das Lied von der Erde

- | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------------|---------|
| 1 | Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde | (8:02) |
| 2 | Der Einsame im Herbst | (9:01) |
| 3 | Von der Jugend | (3:09) |
| 4 | Von der Schönheit | (6:37) |
| 5 | Der Trunkene im Frühling | (4:26) |
| 6 | Der Abschied | (27:18) |

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MAHLER: Das Lied von der Erde

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