Mahler Symphonies 1-9
Czech Philharmonic
Semyon Bychkov

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The cycle of Mahler's symphonies that you now hold in your hands is not only the result of several years in the life of the Czech Philharmonic — countless rehearsals and performances shared with our Chief Conductor Semyon Bychkov — but also the natural culmination of this orchestra's long and remarkable history. Mahler's music has been at the heart of the Czech Philharmonic's story from the very beginning: from the world premiere of his Seventh Symphony on 19 September 1908 in Prague, performed together with members of the New German Theatre under the composer's own baton, through the unforgettable interpretations of Václav Talich and Karel Ančerl, the complete recording made by Václav Neumann in the 1970s and 1980s, to the many Czech and international performances of Mahler conducted by Semyon Bychkov in recent years.

For generations, the musicians of the Czech Philharmonic have carried Mahler's music in their veins — just as they have the music of Dvořák and Smetana. Gustav Mahler wrote about the world we belong to, a world shaped by the creativity and spirit of those who came before us.
We are deeply grateful that our shared journey through Mahler's universe can now reach your ears and hearts, and we hope it speaks to you as profoundly as it moves us every time we perform it live.

With sincere respect,
David Mareček
CEO of the Czech Philharmonic

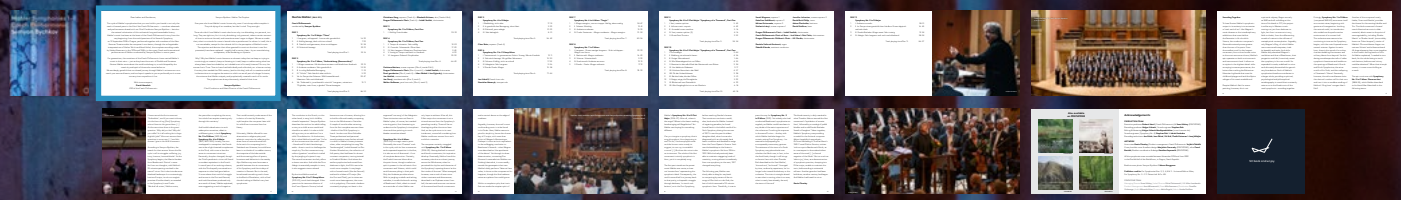
Semyon Bychkov: Mahler The Prophet

Everyone who loves Mahler's music knows why, even if not always able to explain it. They risk dying of an overdose, but don't mind. They are right.

Those who don't love Mahler's music also know why: too disturbing, too personal, too long. They are right too, for it is truly disturbing, truly personal, takes a certain amount of time to arrive at the end, and sometimes even longer to digest. We are so made that, what is a miracle for some is bound to be a punishment for others. In itself, this is not remarkable, except for the colossal shift in the perception of Mahler's music. The rejection and derision that often greeted his music at the time it was first presented, have been replaced - roughly half a century later - by an overwhelming acceptance, often bordering on hysteria.

Why? Why has Mahler's music become so relevant today that we keep on trying to convincingly re-create it, keep on listening to it and, keep on rediscovering what has always been there but eluded us, as it eluded most of its early listeners? For me, the answer lies in Time: Time to have lived individually and collectively as a human society. A society that needed the 20th century (and to this day) with all its creations and all its destructions to recognize the extent to which we are all part of a larger Universe, the universe that Mahler uniquely and prophetically created in each of his works. The prophets are always there early, ahead of their time.

Semyon Bychkov
Chief Conductor and Music Director of the Czech Philharmonic



Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Czech Philharmonic
conducted by **Semyon Bychkov**

DISC 1

Symphony No. 1 in D Major "Titan"

1	I. Langsam, schleppend - Immer sehr gemächlich	16. 39
2	II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell	7. 29
3	III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen	10. 34
4	IV. Stürmisch bewegt	20. 31
	Total playing time Disc 1:	55. 16

DISC 2

Symphony No. 2 in C Minor, "Auferstehung (Resurrection)"

1	I. Allegro maestoso. Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck	23. 15
2	II. Andante moderato. Sehr gemächlich	10. 55
3	III. In ruhig fließender Bewegung	11. 10
4	IV. "Urlicht". Sehr feierlich aber schlicht	5. 29
5	Va. Im Tempo des Scherzos. Wild herausfahrend - Maestoso. Sehr zurückhaltend	20. 47
6	Vb. "Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du". Langsam, misterioso - "O glaube, mein Herz, o glaube". Etwas bewegter	15. 11
	Total playing time Disc 2:	86. 52

Christiane Karg, soprano (Track 6) • **Elisabeth Kulman**, alto (Tracks 4 & 6)
Prague Philharmonic Choir (Track 6) • **Lukáš Vasilek**, choirmaster

DISC 3

Symphony No. 3 in D Minor, *Part One*

1	I. Kräftig. Entschieden	35. 22

DISC 4

Symphony No. 3 in D Minor, *Part Two*

1	II. Tempo di minuetto. Sehr mäßig	10. 02
2	III. Comodo. Scherzando. Ohne Hast	17. 03
3	IV. Sehr langsam. Misterioso. Durchaus leise	9. 45
4	V. Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck	4. 29
5	VI. Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfunden	25. 20
	Total playing time Disc 4:	66. 43

Catriona Morison, mezzo-soprano (Disc 4, tracks 3 & 4)
Prague Philharmonic Choir (Disc 4, track 4) • **Lukáš Vasilek**, choirmaster
Pueri gaudentes (Disc 4, track 4) • **Libor Sládek** & **Jan Kyjovský**, choirmasters
Jan Mráček, concertmaster
Jan Perný, trombone solo (Disc 3, track 1)
Walter Hofbauer, post horn solo (Disc 4, track 2)

DISC 5

Symphony No. 4 in G Major

1	I. Bedächtig, nicht eilen	17. 10
2	II. In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast	9. 23
3	III. Ruhevoll, poco adagio	21. 23
4	IV. Sehr behaglich	8. 51

Total playing time Disc 5: 56. 49

Chen Reiss, soprano (Track 4)

DISC 6

Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor

1	I. Trauermarsch. In gemessenem Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt	13. 11
2	II. Stürmisch bewegt. Mit größter Vehemenz	15. 30
3	III. Scherzo. Kräftig, nicht zu schnell	17. 52
4	IV. Adagietto. Sehr langsam	9. 06
5	V. Rondo-Finale. Allegro	15. 58

Total playing time Disc 6: 71. 44

Jan Vobořil, French horn solo
Stanislav Masaryk, trumpet solo

DISC 7

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor "Tragic"

1	I. Allegro energico, ma non troppo. Heftig, aber markig	24. 47
2	II. Scherzo. Wuchtig	13. 41
3	III. Andante moderato	15. 35
4	IV. Finale. Sostenuto - Allegro moderato - Allegro energico	31. 50

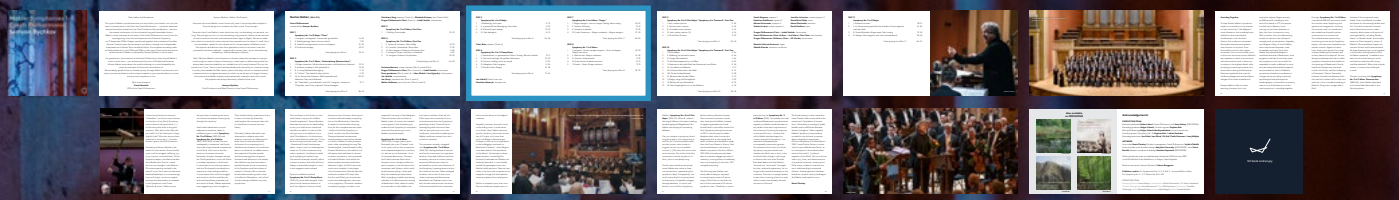
Total playing time Disc 7: 85. 56

DISC 8

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor

1	I. Langsam - Etwas weniger langsam - Nicht schleppen - Allegro con fuoco	22. 33
2	II. Nachtmusik. Allegro moderato	16. 02
3	III. Scherzo. Schattenhaft	9. 32
4	IV. Nachtmusik. Andante amoroso	13. 15
5	V. Rondo - Finale. Allegro ordinario	17. 12

Total playing time Disc 8: 78. 39



DISC 9

Symphony No. 8 in E-Flat Major "Symphony of a Thousand", *Part One*

1	I. Veni, creator spiritus	5. 45
2	II. Infirma nostri corporis	6. 42
3	III. Accende lumen sensibus	5. 16
4	IV. Veni, creator spiritus (2)	4. 16
5	V. Gloria Patri Domino	2. 52

Total playing time Disc 9: 24. 54

DISC 10

Symphony No. 8 in E-Flat Major "Symphony of a Thousand", *Part Two*

1	I. Poco adagio	9. 44
2	II. Waldung, sie schwankt heran	4. 56
3	III. Ewiger Wonnebrand	1. 46
4	IV. Wie Felsenabgrund mir zu Füßen	4. 55
5	V. Gerettet ist das edle Glied der Geisterwelt vom Bösen	3. 34
6	VI. Uns bleibt ein Erdenrest	3. 17
7	VII. Höchste Herrscherin der Welt!	4. 57
8	VIII. Dir der Unberührbaren	3. 38
9	IX. Bei der Liebe, die den Füßen	5. 01
10	X. Neige, neige, du Ohnegleiche	5. 32
11	XI. Blicket auf zum Retterblick	6. 33
12	XII. Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis	6. 18

Total playing time Disc 10: 60. 18

Sarah Wegener, soprano 1
Kateřina Kněžíková, soprano 2
Miriam Kutrowatz, soprano 3
Stefanie Irányi, mezzo-soprano 1
Jennifer Johnston, mezzo-soprano 2
David Butt Philip, tenor
Adam Plachetka, baritone
David Steffens, bass

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Czech Philharmonic Choir of Brno • **Joel Hána** & **Petr Fiala**, choirmasters
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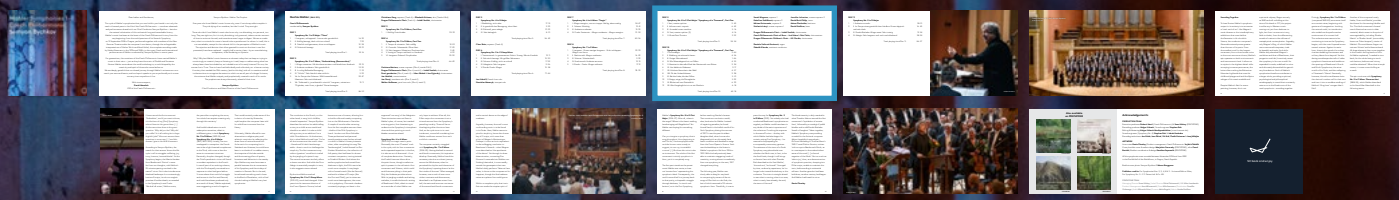

DISC 11

Symphony No. 9 in D Major

1	I. Andante comodo	28. 51
2	II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb	16. 45
3	III. Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig	12. 54
4	IV. Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend	28. 24

Total playing time Disc 11: 86. 57

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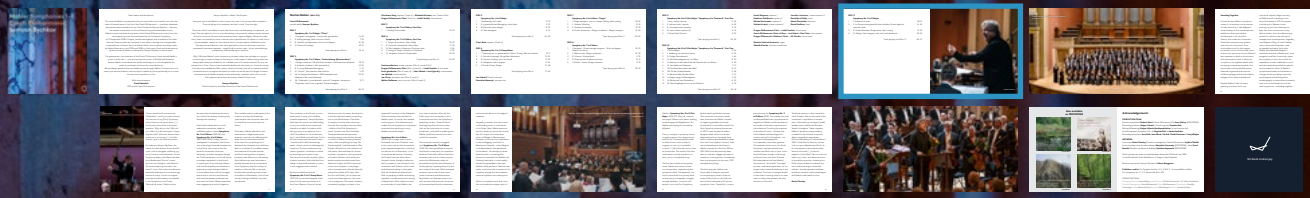

Czech Philharmonic with Semyon Bychkov
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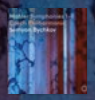


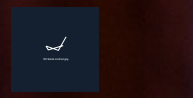










Sounding Together

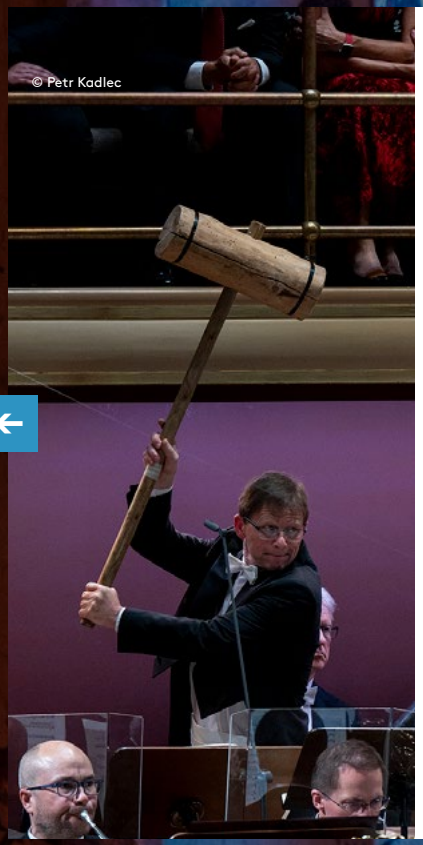
To hear Gustav Mahler's symphonic output in its entirety is to encounter a 'total work of art'. Like Wagner's music dramas or the interdisciplinary exhibitions that were held at the Secession in *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, the conductor-composer's *Gesamtkunstwerk* proves greater than the sum of its parts. From the smallest motif to the longest movement, from a lone human voice to the most enormous chorus, Mahler's epic operates on both a microcosmic and macrocosmic level. It allows us to rejoice in the slightest detail while surveying immense panoramas, the latter often evoking the Bohemian-Moravian highlands that were his childhood playground and the Alpine refuges of his creative adulthood.

Despite Mahler's flair for scene painting, however, this is not a pictorial odyssey. Begun as early as 1883 and still unfolding at the time of his death in 1911, the project is unlike any in Western music: moving not just from darkness to light, but from innocence to irony, faith to doubt, from the effervescing sounds of nature to the stillness of metaphysical contemplation. Arguably, only Wagner's *Ring*, of which Mahler was a renowned interpreter, rivals its breadth and scale. And while Mahler duly absorbed Wagner's worldview and that of Beethoven, their progenitor and idol, he entirely recast the symphony in his own mould. He expanded its scale, redefined its voice and ultimately dismantled the genre's very foundations. Each of Mahler's symphonies therefore contributes to a larger whole, providing a spiritual, psychological and philosophical autobiography in sound that constantly returns us to the Greek roots of the word *symphonia* – sounding together.

Fittingly, **Symphony No. 1 in D Minor** (composed 1883–89) announces itself as a curtain raiser, beginning with gestures of inauguration. Invoking the natural world, its introduction also underlines the performative environment of a concert hall. The orchestra even seems to be continuing to tune as the Symphony begins, with the note A spread across several octaves. Against its eerie hum, there is the sound of a cuckoo, clarinets bubbling like streams and military blasts from beyond. Yet this daring soundscape also tells of wider symphonic literatures and traditions: the openings of Beethoven's Fourth and Ninth Symphonies; the avian motifs of his Sixth; and the wellspring of Smetana's 'Vltava'. Eventually, however, the cellos and basses claim the clarinet's cuckoo call for their own and turn it into a wordless retelling of Mahler's 'Ging heut' morgen über's Feld'.

Another of the composer's early Lieder, 'Hans und Grethe', provides the theme for the ensuing Ländler and Trio. The third movement's funeral march likewise has roots in older material, albeit recast to the point of unrecognizability, including 'Bruder Martin' or 'Bruder Jacob' (more widely known as 'Frère Jacques'), strains of Mahler's 'Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz' and a klezmer band. All these elements then come together in the Finale's thrilling battle of wills. As Mahler explained, 'I needed to turn back, for the whole being to touch rock bottom, before a real victory could be obtained.' When that triumph comes, it is even more thrilling as a result.

The epic continues with **Symphony No. 2 in C Minor 'Resurrection'** (1888–94), which Mahler described to his friend Max Marschalk in the following terms:



I have named the first movement 'Todtenfeier', and if you want to know, it is the hero of my [First] Symphony whom I bear to the grave there. [...] At the same time there is the great question: 'Why did you live? Why did you suffer? Is it all nothing but a huge frightful joke?' We must answer these questions in some way [...] and this answer I give in the final movement.

According to Semyon Bychkov, the search for that answer 'shows the life cycle in all its struggles: suffering, joy, irony, humour, love and doubt'. As the Symphony begins, the Marcia funebre from Beethoven's 'Eroica' is never far from our thoughts, with Mahler's 25-minute opening couched in the same C minor. Yet it also introduces an idealised landscape. In a contrastingly luscious E major, its solo cor anglais promises life after death, as revealed in the Symphony's vast Finale.
'We shall all return,' Mahler wrote, the year after completing the score; 'our whole lives acquire meaning only through this certainty.'

And he did indeed return to such redemptive narratives, albeit in a different guise, in both **Symphony No. 3 in D Minor** (1893–96) and **Symphony No. 4 in G Major** (1892, 1899–1900). Initially, the two overlapped in conception: the Fourth was to be a light-hearted complement to the Third, with more or less the same six-movement structure. Eventually, the plan changed, though the Third's pantheistic vision still found a mordant equivalent in the Fourth. It was all part of an evolving scheme, with the Third equally conceived as a response to what had gone before. 'It *soars* above that world of struggle and sorrow in the First and Second, and could have been produced only as a result of these,' Mahler explained, even suggesting a work of negation.

That would certainly make sense of the inclusion of a text by Nietzsche, a philosopher the composer later told his wife Alma to remove from her library.

Ultimately, Mahler offered his own alternative to religious piety and atheistic conviction by reflecting the sheer force of nature around him. As he sat in his composing hut in Steinbach am Attersee, he could have been in no doubt of its sudden storms, the turquoise of the lake outside and the towering pillars of quartz, limestone and dolomite in the nearby Alps. Mahler may even have seen a parallel between the six movements of his Symphony and the six days of creation in Genesis. But in the end, he achieved something much closer to the Book of Revelation, with a final chorale looking to Mahler's very last symphonies.

The conclusion to the Fourth, on the other hand, is sung 'with childlike, cheerful expression'. Semyon Bychkov describes the work as 'an adult telling a story to a child as one would and should to an adult. It is also a child telling a story to an adult as if to a child. Pure dialectics. At the bottom, this is what Mahler himself was.' So for all the innocence at the work's close – Herod and St Luke's butcherings aside – there is much to challenge the simplicity. The first movement may strike a 'grazioso' mood but is trailed by the jangling of a jester's cap. The second movement similarly offers a *danse macabre*. And while the Poco Adagio is essentially seraphic in tone, it also suggests storms ahead.

By the time Mahler reached **Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor** (1901–02), much had changed. A few years into his tenure as director of the Court Opera in Vienna, he had become a man of means, allowing him to build a villa and nearby composing hut on the Wörthersee in Carinthia. A couple of months after returning from his first complete summer there – drafts of the Fifth Symphony in hand – he also met Alma Schindler. These professional and personal transformations were further echoed in a shift in Mahler's literary interests when, after completing his song 'Der Tambourg'sell', he bid farewell to *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, the collection of folk poetry that had been his almost constant companion, turning instead to Friedrich Rückert. And where the earlier symphonies had moved from darkness to light, the Fifth was to be much more complex. It may begin with a funeral march (like the Second) and end in a blaze of D major (like the First and Third), yet its vistas are much more heterogenous, the score rich in polyphony. Chromatic shadows constantly impinge, not least in the

supposed 'love song' of the Adagietto. These intricacies were not flaws in Mahler's plan, of course, but marked a turning point, first threatening to undermine the Symphony's triumphant close and then pointing to much bleaker narratives ahead.

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor (1903–04) is a tragic case in point. Outwardly the most 'Classical' work in the cycle, with its four movements and a repeated exposition in the first, it is also an act of disavowal – if not of complete destruction. Certainly, the Finale's hammer blows drive the point home, though a nefarious spirit is present in the militaristic first movement and Scherzo, which could annihilate everything in their path. Only the Andante provides solace. With its jangling cowbells and aching melodies, it recalls the bucolic setting of Beethoven's Sixth, albeit to stand as a reminder of what Mahler can only hope to achieve. After all, this E-flat major slow movement is at a tritonal remove from the Symphony's prevailing tonality. There will be no thanksgiving after the storm here. And, as the cycle turns to its next instalment, we are left wondering how Mahler could ever recover from such a nihilistic narrative.

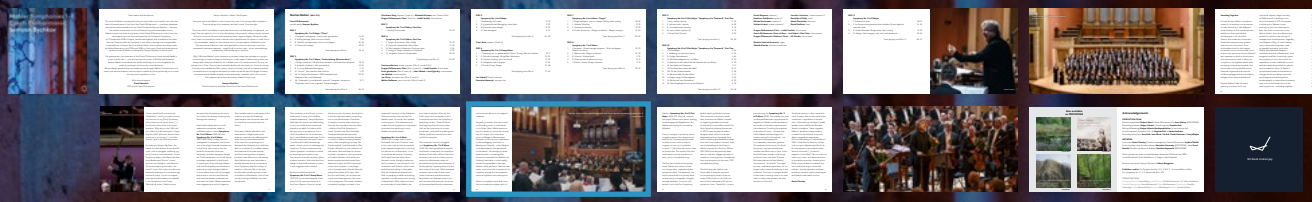
The composer certainly struggled with **Symphony No. 7 in E Minor** (1904–05). Having drafted its second and fourth movements, his inspiration dried up. Eventually, Mahler found the necessary stimulus on a boat journey across the Wörthersee, when he perceived the rhythm and character of the Symphony's opening theme 'at the first stroke of the oars'. What emerged, however, was a work of even more violent contrasts and dissonances, described in an Orphean return from hell, the eerie and amorous nocturnes of the second and fourth movements

and a central dance on the edge of madness.

Arguably, however, the work's most confounding music is to be found in its Finale. Here, Mahler seems to pine for simplicity, hence the chosen key of C major, with more than a hint of Wagner's *Meistersinger*. Perhaps it is also an ironic equivalent to the unflagging conclusion to Beethoven's Seventh – what Wagner once described as 'the apotheosis of the dance'. Yet through its sheer determination, converting Don Giovanni's serenade into Walther von Stolzing's betrothal, it more readily reveals the greasepaint that was Mahler's daily perfume. Taken at face value, it shows us the composer at his happiest, though the final cadence raises an eyebrow few could ignore.

Within a complete cycle, that ironic flair can erode the utopian spirit of

Soloists, choirs and the Czech Philharmonic with Semyon Bychkov rehearsing Symphony No. 8



Mahler's **Symphony No. 8 in E-Flat Major** (1906–07). After all, where is the angst? Where is the heart-rending, handwringing self-flagellation? Yet Mahler was hoping for something different.

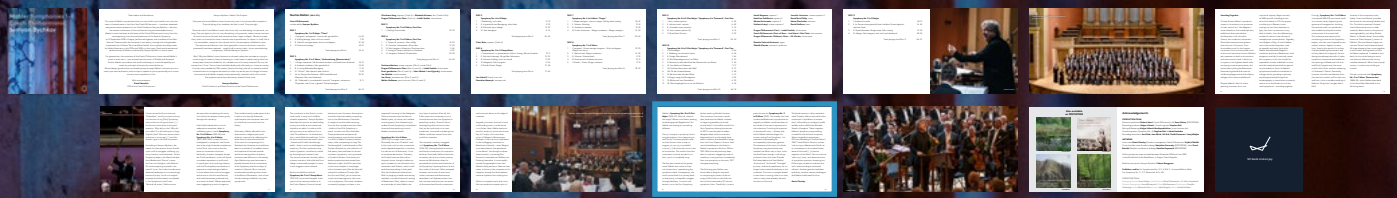
Can you imagine a symphony that is sung throughout, from beginning to end? So far, I have employed words and the human voice merely to suggest, to sum up, to establish a mood. […] But here the voice is also an instrument. The whole of the first movement is strictly symphonic in form, yet it is completely sung.

The first part stands as the purest music Mahler ever wrote, a clear-cut 'sonata form' representing the symphonic ideal. Consequently, the work's second half is a journey back to that purity, a rhapsodic struggle through darkness, 'to touch rock bottom', as in the First Symphony, before reaching Goethe's heaven. That numinous conclusion would, alas, be elusive for Mahler. Instead of regaining paradise, he found himself back in the hellish world of his Sixth Symphony during the summer of 1907. It was the year his eldest daughter died, when he was also diagnosed with an ultimately fatal heart condition and decided to resign from the Court Opera in Vienna. Such was the backdrop to the hiatus in Mahler's symphonic life from 1906 to 1909. While he had previously been able to maintain staggering levels of creativity, moving almost immediately from one symphony to the next, 1907 changed everything.

The following year, Mahler was slowly able to drag his way back to composing by means of the six songs of *Das Lied von der Erde*, the last of which assumed a 30-minute symphonic form. Thankfully, it was to pave the way for **Symphony No. 9 in D Minor** (1909). Yet nobody who had conducted Beethoven's symphonies as regularly as Mahler could have been in any doubt of the eerie importance of the milestone. Couching his response in the same D minor – the key with which Mahler had also begun his curtain-raising First Symphony – he seemed to be preparing for a comparably summatory gesture. The existence of the torso of a Tenth Symphony may place doubt over whether the Ninth was, in fact, to be the final finale, though it still brings us face to face with what Theodor Reik described as the 'last Mahler', 'the real one', 'he himself'. Scourged by time, undone by experience, he 'no longer looks toward the balcony or the orchestra. The vision is straight ahead to see what is coming, what is so near, what is nearly here already, the end, the terror of the end.'

This bleak tenacity is duly revealed in what Theodor Adorno termed the first movement's 'liquidation of sonata form', followed by a nostalgic if pallid Ländler and a wild Rondo-Burleske 'bereft of laughter'. Taken together, Mahler's Symphony was providing a model for the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn's apocalyptic *Dr Fausti Weheklag* in Thomas Mann's 1943–7 novel *Doktor Faustus*, written 'with an eye to Beethoven's Ninth, as its counterpart in the melancholiest sense of the word […] a formal negation of the Ninth'. Not so much an 'ode to joy', then, as a deconstruction of symphonic practice, slumping into D flat major, unable to maintain the tonic, before ending in existential stillness. Another gauntlet had been laid down; another century had begun. And Mahler had heard its voice.

Gavin Plumley



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Recording technicians **Jan Krček**, **Ivan Zbíral**, **Vít Král**, **Čeněk Kotzman** & **Juraj Mišejka**

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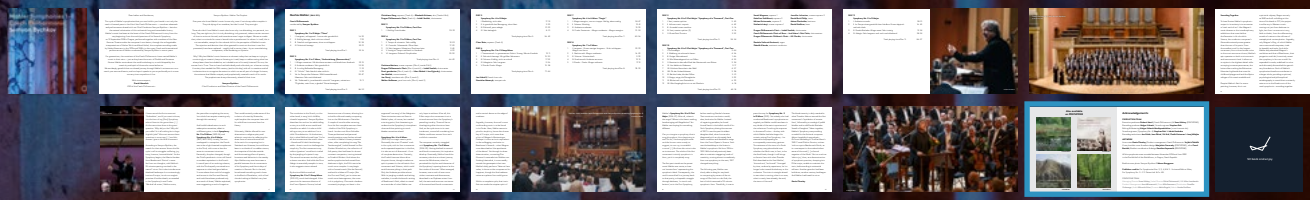

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