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MAHLER
SYMPHONY NO.9

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MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO.9

Gustav Mahler (1803-1911)

Symphony No.9 in D major

1	I. Andante comodo	25.44
2	II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb	15.10
3	III. Rondo-Burleske. Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig	12.46
4	IV. Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend	24.03
Total timings		77.43

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
ESA-PEKKA SALONEN conductor

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MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO.9

MAHLER Symphony No.9 (1909-10)

In 1907, after more than a decade as Director of the Vienna Court Opera, Mahler accepted a post at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. For the remaining four years of his life, he spent six months in New York (October to March) and six months in Austria (April to September), where he continued to spend the summer months in his beloved mountain landscapes. *Das Lied von der Erde*, the Eighth, Ninth and unfinished Tenth symphonies were all written in a small forest hut in the Dolomites (then part of Austria, now in Italy). The tension Mahler endured all his life, between a hectic conducting season in the city and the solitude of his summer composing retreats, must have felt even more pronounced in these last years. Returning to the idyllic peace of the mountains, after long transatlantic crossings and the foreignness of his American life (he spoke very little English), must have been marked by an overwhelming sense of homecoming.

Such a feeling is evident in both *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Ninth Symphony.

Mahler's late music is often associated with the idea of farewell, specifically a farewell to life itself (he was diagnosed with a fatal heart disease in 1907). This association was first elaborated after the posthumous première of the Ninth Symphony on 26 June 1912, conducted in Vienna by Bruno Walter. The idea was repeated over and again, and continues today as a dominant reading of the symphony. 'If you want to learn to weep,' wrote one critic after the première, 'you should listen to the first movement of the Ninth, the great, magnificent song of ultimate farewell.' But one might also hear, alongside the farewell, a powerful sense of return. The first movement of the Ninth Symphony is saturated with this double-edged sense, of both a final homecoming and of a world viewed from an increasingly great distance.

The Mahler who returned from New York in 1909 to the luminous space of the Austrian alps was not quite the same Mahler who set out as a young man in the First Symphony, some twenty years earlier. There is something particularly intense about the beauty of this first movement, like those unbelievably bright autumn days when everything seems to stand out in blinding focus. Alban Berg, present at the première, captured this sense in a letter to his wife: 'The first movement is the most glorious he ever wrote. It expresses an extraordinary love of this earth, for Nature; the longing to live on it in peace, to enjoy it completely, to the very heart of one's being, before death comes, as irresistibly it does.'

Berg went on to say that the whole first movement 'is based on a premonition of death'. This is quite literally written into the form of the piece, which alternates constantly between wistfully lyrical sections in D major, and a kind of negative version in D minor. With each successive return, the distance between these musical worlds seems to increase, as the music plunges from heroic striving, on the brink of some rapturous breakthrough, to moments of complete collapse into a shadowy, empty landscape (Mahler's marking is *Schattenhaft*). Faced with no hope of reconciling such an

opposition, the end of the movement is shaped by quiet withdrawal and dream-like reminiscence. Mahler marks the final page of the score 'lingering'; in the sketches, he wrote simply 'Leb'wohl!' (Farewell!).

The second movement alternates four contrasting Austrian dances – two *Ländler* (country dances) and two waltzes. The first *Ländler* is marked 'somewhat clumsy and very crude', its raw quality underlined by the bad behaviour of the horns and the instruction to the violinists to play 'like fiddlers'. This is a country dance in heavy, muddy boots, done with great affection even as it gently falls apart into loquacious repetitions. The rustic cartoon is interrupted by a mad waltz that spirals out of control, changing key with a sense of drunken abandon. A second waltz, given in the low brass, sounds like a military band has invaded the orchestra, before a second, slower *Ländler*, evokes a wistfully sentimental recollection of the countryside. Mahler's modernity here lies not so much in his materials (bewilderingly familiar to his first listeners) but in the way that he foregrounds the lack of fit between them as the music lurches from the frivolous to the grotesque, the sentimental to the modern. At the end of the movement, Mahler allows his orchestra to fall apart like a machine shedding

its parts one by one. The music breaks into fragments, scattered around the orchestra, until the whole thing simply runs out of steam.

In the third movement, the sense of distortion and exaggeration is greatly magnified. Mahler's *Rondo-Burleske* presents a highly energetic and contrapuntal music, but one that struggles to contain its plural voices, all tugging in different directions at once. Just as it seems ready to implode under its own weight, this unrelentingly strict style gives way to a lightweight music that sounds like operetta (some critics heard echoes of Lehár's *The Merry Widow*!). The recurrent interruption of one element by the other is eventually broken by an astonishingly self-conscious act of authorial intrusion. Mahler 'rips up' the music heard thus far, like a film-director suddenly intercutting a completely different scene. A series of *glissandi* in the harp introduce a disjointed set of musical voices – some of them grotesque and distorted (the E flat clarinet) and others earnestly expressive (the solo trumpet). This whole passage, suspended out of normal symphonic time, functions like a set of dream visions of what might be, before we are plunged back into the movement's opening material, which gathers ferocious force all the way to the end.

The *Adagio* Finale stands in absolute and complete contrast to the previous two movements. Where they delivered a succession of ironic voices, thrown around the orchestra in a mad whirl, the *Adagio* presents one of Mahler's most intense statements of an authentic lyrical voice. It is signalled in its solemn and hymn-like gait, but above all in the intensity of tone that he wrings from the close scoring of the strings. Here, too, progress is defined by the alternation of two different types of music – the richly scored, passionate and almost painfully beautiful opening, and a passage of bare, two-part music, shocking for its apparent emptiness and marked to be played 'without emotion'. The more bare the latter becomes, the more intensely the other is affirmed: if the Ninth is indeed a farewell, it does not 'go gentle into that good night'.

Nobody who feels this music intensely would be so crass as to attempt to say 'what it is' that Mahler's music sings about. What lingers long after the resonance of the last fragile notes have died away into silence, is that he *did* – that such a passionate singing was voiced. As all three preceding movements have done, the Finale also ends by means of a gradual process of fragmentation, but whereas the middle movements break down or fall apart, the Finale gently dissolves; its

constituent lines, no longer held together, evaporate one by one. The final *Adagissimo* must be the longest last page in music history, as the remaining fragments of melodic lines,

receding into the distance, are gradually reclaimed by an incoming tide of silence.

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BIOGRAPHIES

ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

Born in Helsinki, the conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen studied at the Sibelius Academy, and made his conducting début with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in 1979. He was Chief Conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra for ten years (1985-1995) and Director of the Helsinki Festival in 1995 and 1996. From 1992 until 2009 Salonen was Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and was named the orchestra's Conductor Laureate in April 2009.

Since September 2008 Salonen has been Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra. In his first season in this role he devised and led *City of Dreams*, a nine-month exploration of the music and

culture of Vienna between 1900 and 1935. The project, which presented the music of Mahler, Schoenberg, Zemlinsky and Berg in its social and historical context, travelled to 18 cities across Europe, culminating in October 2009 with semi-staged performances of Berg's *Wozzeck*, with Simon Keenlyside in the title role. A series of recordings from the project is being released on the Philharmonia/Signum label, of which *Gurrelieder* is already available. Other highlights of the 2009/10 season with the Philharmonia Orchestra include the UK première of Magnus Lindberg's new choral work *GRAFFITI*, and touring throughout Europe and Japan.

His appointment with the Philharmonia cements a relationship that dates back over 25 years. Esa-Pekka Salonen made his London conducting début with the Philharmonia

Orchestra in September 1983 (when he was 25 years old), stepping in at the last minute for an indisposed Michael Tilson Thomas to conduct a now-legendary performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 3. The chemistry was immediate, and Salonen formed a strong bond with the players. He was offered the position of Principal Guest Conductor, which he held from 1985-1994, and he has returned to conduct the Orchestra on a regular basis ever since. Some of the Philharmonia's most ambitious and important projects during this time, from *Clocks and Clouds* (Ligeti, 1996) to *Related Rocks* (Magnus Lindberg, 2001-2), have taken place under his artistic leadership.

Esa-Pekka Salonen's guest conducting engagements in the season 2009/10 include, amongst others, appearances with the New York Philharmonic, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra and the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra. In August 2009, Salonen conducted the Vienna Philharmonic at Salzburg Festival. He will also conduct the Patrice Chéreau production of Janáček's opera *From the House of the Dead* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York and the Teatro alla Scala, Milan.

In his time as Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, highlights have included

residencies at the Salzburg Festival, Köln Philharmonie and at the Théâtre du Châtelet, Paris, as well as numerous European tours and guest performances in Japan. On the occasion of his 17 year tenure the Los Angeles Philharmonic celebrated him with a series of concerts in April 2009, including the première of his own violin concerto.

Esa-Pekka Salonen is renowned for his interpretations of contemporary music and has given countless premières of new works. He has led critically acclaimed festivals of music by Berlioz, Ligeti, Schoenberg, Shostakovich and Stravinsky and Magnus Lindberg. In April 2006 he returned to Paris Opéra Bastille to conduct the première of Kaija Saariaho's new opera, *Adriana Mater*, having previously conducted the Finnish première of her first opera *L'amour de loin* in 2004. In August 2007, he conducted Saariaho's *La Passion de Simone* in a production by Peter Sellars at the Helsinki Festival (first Finnish performance) before taking the production to the Baltic Sea Festival in Stockholm.

Salonen is artistic director of the Baltic Sea Festival, which he co-initiated in 2003. As an annual event in August in Stockholm and across the Baltic Sea region, it invites

celebrated orchestras, conductors and soloists to promote unity and ecological awareness among the countries around the Baltic Sea.

Esa-Pekka Salonen has a considerable discography. In addition to the *Gurrelieder* recording, which launched the new partnership with the Philharmonia's Signum label, and this disc, recent and forthcoming releases with the Orchestra on the same label include Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* and Mahler's Symphony No. 6. Other recent releases, on Deutsche Grammophon, include a disc of Salonen works performed with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and a DVD of Kaija Saariaho's opera, *L'amour de loin* with the Finnish National Opera

as well as two CDs with Hélène Grimaud with works by Pärt and Schumann. In November 2008, Deutsche Grammophon released a new CD with Salonen's piano concerto and his works *Helix* and *Dichotomie*. The first recording of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Salonen for Deutsche Grammophon (Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* – first CD recording ever at Walt Disney Concert Hall) was released in October 2006 and nominated for a Grammy in December 2007. After recording for Sony Classical for many years, Salonen has an extensive discography with repertoire ranging from Mahler and Revueltas to Magnus Lindberg and his own works. Most of his works are also available at DG Concerts on iTunes.

philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music

education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. Every year the Orchestra performs more than 200 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. Since 1995 the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK Residency Programme, which began with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank Centre, and now also includes De Montfort Hall in Leicester, the Anvil in Basingstoke and a series of partnerships across Kent and the Thames Gateway, based in Canterbury. The Orchestra's international extensive touring schedule each season involves appearances at the finest concert halls across Europe, the USA and Asia.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and

Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director) and Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate).

The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers as well as their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers and a new Orchestral Award, inaugurated in 2005, allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra.

The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing



and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them the Artistic Director of its Music of Today series, Julian Anderson. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan. The Philharmonia Orchestra's joint series with SBC, *Clocks and Clouds: The Music of György Ligeti*, won the Royal Philharmonic Society's Best Concert

Series Award in 1997 and *Related Rocks: The Music of Magnus Lindberg*, was nominated for an RPS Award. Other recent awards for the Orchestra include the RPS Large Ensemble Award and two *Evening Standard* Awards for Outstanding Artistic Achievement and Outstanding Ensemble. In May 2007 PLAY. orchestra, a 'virtual Philharmonia Orchestra' created in partnership with Southbank Centre and Central St Martin's College of Art, won the RPS Education Award.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in now audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website launched in 2005, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange), which is now visited by almost 2 million people a year.

In 2005 the Philharmonia became the first ever classical music organisation to be shortlisted for a BT Digital Music Award, and in the same year the Orchestra presented the first ever concert webcast. Now more than 3500 people a month download free monthly Philharmonia video podcasts, which include artist interviews and features on repertoire and projects; these films are also watched by more than 60,000 people on YouTube. Recording and broadcasting both continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities: since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

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