

The Mahler Monument in Jihlava



Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava

The years 2010 and 2011 will be particularly important ones for all those who love the work of Gustav Mahler and honour his memory as one of the greatest composers and conductors of all time. On July 7th 2010, 150 years will have passed since Mahler's birth and on May 18th 2011 exactly a century will have gone by since his death. These key dates will be especially remembered in Jihlava, where Mahler spent the first fifteen years of his life, where he graduated from the local school and where he received so many indelible impressions that were later made manifest in his music. For Mahler, the Jihlava era was a vital formative one; for Jihlava, Mahler is the town's most famous son by far.

It was above all with these coming anniversaries in mind, that local citizens got together and established the *Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava* (founded on April 14th 2004 and registered five days later by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Czech Republic). This initiative was felt to be all the more essential because although full-sized statues exist of most of the great composers, in their homelands and even beyond, this is – remarkably – not so in Mahler's case.

Not that memorials to Mahler are wholly lacking! One quite large and impressive sculpture can be found in the square at Toblach (Dobbiaco), the town close to which Mahler composed the bulk of his later works in the summers of 1908, 1909 and 1910. There are also striking busts of the composer – notably those fashioned by the Frenchman Auguste Rodin early in the last century and by the Czech sculptor Milan Knobloch in our own time. Another memorial work designed by the Jihlava architect Martin Laštovička is exhibited on the ground floor of the Horácké Theatre, where Mahler gave his first public performance (as a pianist) on October 13th 1870. As for Vienna, where Mahler directed the *Hofoper* during its "golden decade" from 1897–1907, plans for a major monument were laid (and, indeed, collections made) in the 1920s and early 1930s. But for various reasons these efforts bore no fruit, and in any case were ruled out altogether after Austria's *Anschluss* with Nazi Germany in 1938.

This lack of a full-sized statue of Mahler needs to be made good – and what better place could there be to do so than Jihlava and at what better time than now? That, at any rate, was the view of those of us who have set up the society and who are pursuing our goal with the backing of authorities both in Jihlava itself and in the surrounding region. As a key first step we approached the eminent Czech sculptor Jan Koblasa, whose name is a guarantee of the highest quality, and asked him to take on the project. Happily, he agreed to do so and started intensive work on the designs and models. We also felt that, of the many possible sites for the proposed monument, the market in busy Benešova Street – outside the town's old fortifications – was the most appropriate one. A Jewish synagogue that Mahler used to visit with his parents existed there from 1863 to 1939, but it was burned down by the local Nazis. Hence the new monument will also serve as dignified memorial to Jihlava's holocaust victims.

On 18th May 2005, Professor Koblasa officially presented his comprehensive plan – that includes a park in which the Mahler statue would be sited – to the municipal authorities in Jihlava. On 12th January 2006, the town approved both this concept as well as the location in Benešova Street, and also agreed to release 4 million CZK for the park layout. The realisation of the monument itself, that is the statue and other sculptural elements associated with it, will be financed through the Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava. The cost is not expected to exceed 2.5 million CZK. The town of Jihlava and the Vysočina region have promised to finance up to half of this sum. The other half needs to be found through sponsors and donations – large and small!

Please help us realise this ambitious and deserving project. We thank you warmly in advance for any aid you feel able to give. 

Proposal for a Gustav Mahler park in Jihlava, featuring a memorial to the composer

Jan Koblasa

I believe that to honour so great a composer it is not enough just to erect a small memorial behind the town wall. In my view the whole marked area must be turned into a park that in its breadth and grandeur would symbolise what Mahler's music conveys to us. The monument to the artist himself would be the central point of the whole complex.

We know that Gustav Mahler felt a special, intense empathy with nature and that this element constantly emerges in the most varied ways in his work. We should, therefore, use basic natural materials in laying out the park but also modify them into various symbolic designs – much as nature is represented in Japanese or Chinese pictures. Mahler was greatly attracted to these pictures, as well as to oriental poetry, thanks to their sensitive realisation of universal experience – and he made use of them in his musical language. My design therefore aims to use natural elements transformed in a similar way

I aim to make use of the following: **STONE**, sculpted or in bulk, not least for objects such as enclosures, curbs and benches; **WATER** for rivulets and fountains; **PLANTS** for lawns, flower beds, shrubs (rhododendrons and other evergreens) as well as decorative trees and vines. The aim is to ensure that the park will have an attractive and lively appearance throughout the whole year. I believe that, when fully realised, this will become the **PLACE** to be enjoyed by visitors from near and far who aim to trace the origins of Mahler's life and work. It will be a spot steeped in the past that nonetheless encourages meditation on all that Mahler's timeless compositions have to tell us today.

GUSTAV MAHLER's monument is, of course, the core of the whole project. I propose a figure slightly larger than life (i.e. about 250 cm. tall – a classical height used for 1:1 statues throughout the ages, from antiquity right through to Rodin's imposing monument to Balzac in the 19th century). I aim for a posture in which the figure initially rises firmly – unencumbered by detail – from the pedestal and





then in the upper part, around shoulders and neck, acquires a tension of the kind a conductor feels as he seeks to gain control over a large orchestra – or, indeed, that a composer experiences as he senses music within the world of nature around him. The whole figure will be slightly bent forward, like a flower being attracted to the source of life. Here, I have in mind the *Wunderhorn* poem set to music by Mahler about St. Anthony of Padua preaching to the fishes. The only descriptive detail that I aim to include is the bow tie that the composer is seen to be wearing in so many pictures.

The figure, in bronze with a dark patina on verdigris green, will stand on a polished granite pedestal – itself 120 cm. high and in the form of a partly truncated pyramid with a rectangular rear. Mahler's signature will be picked out in gold on the smooth side at the front. The other sides will be covered by floral ornaments engraved into the polished stone. We will try to find and use beautiful granite from the local Mrákotín area (although strictly speaking red granite would be optically more effective). Below the figure itself there will be a four-cornered area with stairs for seating, as well as a round pond lined with pebbles. A fountain roughly 100 cm. high, 400–500 cm. long and 50 cm. wide will spray water onto the stone walls and thence into the pond from ten openings. These openings symbolise Mahler's ten symphonies and will be clearly marked with bronze beaks – so that the symbolism will be manifest even when the water spouts do not operate during the winter months.

The entrance to the park from the main road will be marked by the stone figures of two birds facing one another and roughly 400 cm. high. They symbolise love and singing and hence relate to vital elements of Mahler's work. A third but smaller bird in the background will look up at the other two – both a symbol of wonder and a design that helps give unity to the whole complex. All the birds will be made of stone – perhaps from Mrakotin or, failing that, from other quarries.

Such is my plan for the design and construction of a memorial park to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava. Further details and specifications will emerge in the course of consultation between the architect, representatives of the town and members of the Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava. ■

Gustav Mahler

born on 7th July 1860 in Kaliště near Humpolec
died on 18th May 1911 in Vienna
composer and conductor



Mahler lived in Jihlava from October 1860 to the autumn of 1875 – then left to study at the Conservatory in Vienna. He attended the Jihlava grammar school from 1869–1875 (subsequently receiving private tuition) and on September 12th 1877 he passed the school leaving exams. Between 1870 and 1883 he gave several concerts in the town, both as piano soloist and as accompanist to other musicians, and repeatedly returned afterwards – in particular until the death of his parents in 1889. He had the right of domicile in Jihlava throughout his life.

As a conductor he worked in Bad Hall (1880), Olomouc (1883), Kassel (1883–1885), Prague (1885–1886), Leipzig (1886–1888), Budapest (1888–1891), Hamburg (1891–1897) and, above all, in Vienna from 1897 to 1907 where he was director of the *Hofoper* in what became known as its “golden age”. From 1908 to 1911 he conducted mainly in New York, both at the Metropolitan Opera and latterly with the New York Philharmonic. As a composer, Mahler is regarded both as the last great symphonist of the nineteenth century and as a bridge to the modern era. His works – riveting in their unique welding of exultation with despair, of irony with naivety, of anguished questioning with affirmation – not only had a profound influence on Schoenberg and his “New Viennese” school but also on artists as diverse as Shostakovich, Britten and Stockhausen. Indeed, it is fair to say that modern music is unthinkable without Mahler, although it was not until the birth of the long-playing record in the 1950s that his work was more widely accepted. Subsequently it has become hugely and durably popular.

Mahler composed 10 symphonies – although he left the last one as a torso from which various musicians (among them Deryck Cooke, Remo Mazzetti and Rudolf Barshai) have produced “performing versions”). Other works include the early cantata *Das klagende Lied* (The Song of Lament); song cycles such as *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* (Songs of a Wayfarer), *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children); and many individual songs mainly taken from the *Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth’s Magic Horn) collection. For many, *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) – composed in 1908 and described as “a symphony for a tenor and an alto (or baritone) voice and orchestra” – is his supreme masterpiece.



Jan Koblasa

born 1932 in Tábor

sculptor, painter, graphic artist, scenographer

A graduate of the Prague Academy of Art (1952–1958) and co-founder of the Šmidrové Group which emerged from Dadaism, Koblasa was the key figure in the radical stream of Czech art in the 1960s. In 1968 he emigrated – first to Italy and then, from 1969 to 1982, to Kiel in northern Germany where he founded and headed the department of sculpture at the Muthesius Kunsthochschule. Since 1982 he has lived and worked in Hamburg. He has visited the Czech Republic repeatedly since 1990 and from 2002 to 2005 was professor of sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. His work has been shown at many exhibitions, among them a retrospective from August 3rd to November 5th 2006 at the Regional Gallery in Jihlava.

Professor Koblasa was taken part in many symposia on sculpture since 1966 and his works are prized in public and private collections throughout Europe, America, Asia, and Africa. Among his most famed creations, for example, are the ornamentation for the presbytery in the Church of St Peter and Paul in Jedovnice (1963–1964 with Mikuláš Medek); the relief in the hall of Prague Airport (1967); the Crucifixion for the Church of St Paul and Gerhardt in Dietrichsdorf (1983); as well as the sculptures Seven Days and The Column of Life in Kiel (1989) and Odysseus and Penelope in České Budějovice (1996). He has received very many awards over the years for his work.



Many thanks for correction and completion of the English text belong to Mr Jonathan Carr.



Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava
Civic association with its place of residence in Jihlava, Stamicova 13, IČO 26662361

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Vážený pan
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č.j. OŠKT/06/108

Jihlava 2006-01-20

Sdělení.

Vážený pane Poukare,

mám milou povinnost sdělit Vám, že Rada města Jihlavy na své 74.schůzi přijala svým usnesením č. 4/06-RM následující text:

Rada města Jihlavy

souhlasí

s umístěním pomníku Gustava Mahlera na prostranství mezi ulicemi Benešova, Věžní a Husova v Jihlavě (plocha stávající tržnice) dle návrhu akademického sochaře prof. Jana Koblasy (viz příloha č. 1) dle zůvodnění.

V předkládaném návrhu byla Rada města Jihlavy informována o aktivitě Vašeho společenství ve věci pomníku Gustava Mahlera a spolupráce s akademickým sochařem, profesorem Janem Koblasou, i s návrhem pomníku.

Po důkladném uvážení všech zainteresovaných stran bylo doporučeno, aby pomník byl umístěn v prostorách stávající tržnice. Po výsledku hospodaření města za rok 2005 bude předložen Zastupitelstvu města Jihlavy návrh na zařazení akce - sadové úpravy stávající tržnice do rozpočtu roku 2006, a to ve výši 4 mil. Kč (spočívajících v částečné demolici stávajících objektů, zemních pracích včetně zasíťování pozemků a vlastních sadových úpravách). Pokud bude tento návrh schválen, bude vypsáno výběrové řízení na projektovou dokumentaci a následně na realizaci výše uvedeného prostranství. Nově vzniklý park by měl být založen tak, aby vlastní pomník mohl být v roce 2011 osazen do již připravené zeleně.

Z předcházejících jednání vyplynulo, že realizaci sochy a ostatních prvků bude zajišťovat vaše Společenství za zřízení pomníku Gustava Mahlera Jihlava, Stamicova 13.

Z tohoto důvodu Vás informuji o možnosti požádat Statutární město Jihlava a ostatní instituce o příspěvek na realizaci pomníku. Zároveň upozorňuji na skutečnost, že objem takto získaných veřejných prostředků by neměl přesáhnout 50 % z celkové částky, protože v tomto případě by jste byli povinováni postupovat podle zákona č. 40/2004 Sb. o zadávání veřejných zakázek.

Mgr. Tomáš Koukal
vedoucí odboru

Magistrát města Jihlavy
odbor školství,
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The Municipal authorities of Jihlava
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Mr
Ing Josef Poukar
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r. n. OŠKT/06/108

Jihlava, 1st February 2006

Dear Mr Poukar,

I would like to notify you that the Town Council of Jihlava accepted at its 74th meeting by the resolution no. 4/06-RM the following text:

The Town Council of Jihlava

agrees

with the placing of the Gustav Mahler's Monument at the area among the streets Benešova, Věžní and Husova in Jihlava (the area of the present market place) according to the project by academic sculptor professor Jan Koblasa (see enclosure 1) according to the warrant.

The Town Council of Jihlava was informed in the submitted project about the activity of your Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava and cooperation with the sculptor professor Jan Koblasa and his project.

After the thorough consideration of all interested sides it was recommended the monument to be placed in the area of the present market place. The proposal of enlistment of the action – park layout of the present market place into the budget of the town in 2006 in the amount of 4 million CZK (consisting of part demolition of the present objects, groundwork, including networks and itself park layout) will be presented at the next session of the Town Council. If the project is approved, the tendering for project documentation and then the realization of the above written area will be proclaimed. The newly established park should be constipated in such a way that the monument itself could be set there into the prepared green in 2011.

It ensued from the previous discussions that the realization of the monument and other element will be ensured by your Society for the Erection of a Monument to Gustav Mahler in Jihlava, Stamicova 13.

For this reason I inform you about the possibility to ask the Statutory Town of Jihlava and other institutions for the contribution on the realization of the monument. At the same time I have to warn that the amount of public adventitious contribution should not be more than 50% of the whole amount. Otherwise you would have duty to act according the law no. 40/2004 about the entry of public orders.

Tomáš Koukal
department manager