Gustav Mahler

The meaning behind the symphonies

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Senior Integration Project
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Gustav Mahler's Nine Symphonies, Das Lied von der Erde and the incomplete Tenth Symphony present an interesting, very deep and very broad worldview that grows and enters new dimensions with each symphony. Each symphony presents Mahler's fundamental philosophy of life and death, the heroic and the personal, which is very deeply embedded in the music. "Each of Mahler's symphonies, as well as presenting a purely musical argument, attempts to define an attitude to life. Mahler (1860-1911) was really one of the first existentialists, using his compositions as a means of working out some kind of coherent *Weltanschauung*."[1] The attitude to life that David Matthews refers to is Mahler's own personal view of life. It is the world through *his* eyes and the construct of *his* mind that is portrayed in these symphonies. Each symphony had a new approach to the existential problem, but there is a strong continuity between them. With each symphony, Mahler created a world for himself and his listeners. It was not enough to simply contribute to the literature, but the world he built must take over the listener completely. This is part of the reason for the length of his symphonies; it hardly allowed for other music and lured the listener into the seclusion of this symphonic world.

Mahler was a very strange, intense man of whom Richard Specht wrote, "I do not believe that anyone ever truly knew Mahler." Kurt Blaukopf also wrote, "He was unpredictable. He never fully gave his allegiance to anyone. He never fully exposed himself to anyone. Creative activity was all he really cared about."[2] Mahler understood that no one else really understood him. Mahler claimed that "we musicians are worse off than the poets. Everyone can read. But a printed musical score is a sealed book. Even conductors, who can decipher it, present it to the public imbued with their varying conceptions. The important thing is to create a tradition, and I'm the only one who can do it."[3] Knowing that neither he nor his music was understood, he still confidently claimed, "My time will come."[4]

Mahler was somewhat of a tyrant when it came to conducting, which caused him much anxiety along the way. He began his conducting career (mainly in opera, interestingly) in Laibach (present day Ljubljana) from 1882-3, and went to Olmütz in 1883, Kassel from 1883-5, Prague from 1885-6, Leipzig from 1886-8, Budapest (the Royal Hungarian Opera) from 1888-91, Hamburg from 1891-97, the Vienna Court Opera from 1897-1907 and New York (the Philharmonic) from 1908-11. The years in Vienna (of which 1905 was the greatest) were the happiest of his life because his position was secure. He was famous all over Europe, had six symphonies in print and the seventh was complete. His interpretations of opera, especially Wagner's operas, were truly world class, even if they were controversial in his day. His understanding of acoustics and clarity of tempi was outstanding. "A tempo is right if everything still comes across. If a figure can no longer be grasped by the ear because the sounds merge into one another, then the tempo is too fast. In the case of a presto, the upper limit of distinctness is the right tempo – beyond this, it loses effectiveness."[5] He told the orchestra in a rehearsal of the Second Symphony, "Clarity is my chief concern. All power to the conductor who alters my scores where the acoustics of the hall or the quality of the orchestra demand it, to carry out my intentions."[6]

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[1] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Georg Solti, *Mahler: The Symphonies*, comments by David Matthews, London 430 804, 1991. CD.

[2] Kurt Blaukopf, *Mahler*, trans. Inge Goodwin (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), 27.

[3] Ibid., 196.

[4] Ibid., 189.

Mahler always struggled with the programmatic issue in his music. He began by writing clear programs for the First and Second Symphonies, and to some extent the Third, but by the time he composed the Fourth, he had become very much opposed to program music. The programs in his symphonies never preceded the music. The Third, Fourth and Eighth Symphonies all had preliminary notes, but the plan never determined the outcome. He made great distinction between writing program music and merely drawing upon words to articulate musical ideas. And he was never consistent, sometimes providing different programs for the same music (three programs exist for the Second Symphony) and sometimes providing no program at all. He began to claim that his music was understandable without an overt program, but that every significant piece of "absolute music" contained a secret program. This sort of contradiction was usual for Mahler who claimed the right "to be inconsistent."[7] Perhaps for Mahler, there really was no such thing as "absolute music." He always seemed to have an element of transcendence in his music. As his work continued, Mahler found program music more and more abhorrent. At a private listening in Leipzig to a piece called "Im stillen Tal" (In the tranquil valley), he burst out with disapproval of this program piece saying mockingly, "Very good! Absolutely true to life! I know that valley – at least I think I recognize it – it is situated in Styria."[8]

Mahler was a Jew from Bohemia, but because of the anti-Semitic atmosphere of Vienna during his stay there, he became a Catholic. "As things stand at present in Vienna, perhaps I should tell you that quite a while ago, in pursuance of a long-standing resolution, I entered the Catholic Faith."[9] It is interesting that he uses the term "faith." Whether or not this faith was true saving faith is debatable, which we shall see. Perhaps this religious impulse was part of accepting and assimilating the European culture of the day. Obviously, by the time Mahler assumed his post in Vienna, he was widely traveled throughout Germany, Austria, Hungary, and France. No doubt he picked up a few ideas along the way. Blaukopf asserts that Mahler's Christianity was deeply felt. However, he also says, "In his mind Christian thought was amalgamated with the pantheism revealed in his commentary on the Third Symphony."[10] In his music, Mahler does often include Christian sentiments or values (especially about life after death), but they are usually combined with a more humanistic creed or set of values, such as in the Second, Third and Eighth Symphonies. Perhaps Mahler would not have distinguished between these two worldviews. There is much evidence in his music to support Blaukopf's statement. Christianity was very much part of the culture of the day and was itself infused with humanism. Mahler likely did not draw any more distinction than that.

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[5] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 189.

[6] Ibid., 252.

[7] Ibid., 204.

[8] Ibid., 78.

[9] Ibid., 131.

Mahler considered his symphonies to flow from one another. He noted that the Second tied directly in with the First and the Third. The Third took a look at the world of the First and Second from the vantage point of nature. Mahler saw his symphonic writing as an expression of his worldview, making the personal, philosophical and religious questions that concerned him the subjects of his early symphonies especially. Transcendence – overcoming misery and suffering – is the fundamental thought of the First. Constantin Floros describes the Second, Third and Fourth:

> The eschatological question of death and dying is the subject of the Second Symphony. The idea of a hierarchy of being, the formation of the world, the position of humankind within it, and Mahler's personal profession of *eternal love*, form the cosmological subject of the Third. The…Fourth may finally be denoted as symphonic meditations on *life after death*.[11]

The First Symphony, "Titan"

When Mahler began to write symphonies in the 1880s, obviously the model was still Beethoven and to a lesser degree, Brahms, Bruckner, Schubert, Schumann and DvoŚak. At first, he was unsure of even calling his First Symphony a symphony. He called it a symphonic poem in two parts.

1st Part: "From the Days of Youth." Flower-Fruit-and Thorn pieces:

1. Spring without end (Intro. And Allegro comodo)
2. Blumine (Andante)
3. In full sail (Scherzo)

2nd Part: "Comedia humana"

4. Aground (Funeral March "in the manner of Callot")
5. Dall Inferno (Allegro furioso), the sudden eruption of a heart cut to the quick[12]

The first four performances were not received well and, eventually, Mahler dropped the Blumine movement and the program altogether in an attempt to make the symphony appear more classical.

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[10] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 141.

[11] Constantin Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, trans. Vernon and Jutta Wicker (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 1993), 22.

[12] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

Mahler at first named the symphony “Titan” after a novel by Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (both have a similar life cycle theme, leading the hero in a big circle back to something like the starting point) although he later denied any connection between the two for the sake of absolute music. Natalie Bauer-Lechner claimed that “What he had in mind was simply a strong, heroic person, living and suffering, struggling with and succumbing to destiny, for which the true, higher resolution is not given until the Second.”[13] Mahler was also likely influenced by Nietzsche in the First. Nietzsche’s ideas were so prevalent in European culture that everyone, at one time or another, had to reckon with them. Mahler probably assimilated Nietzsche’s “superman” idea, maybe without even realizing it. But Nietzsche’s idea of the “superhuman” resulted from the idea that God is “dead.” Mahler did not believe this. The first movement gives us a jubilant feeling by looking at a life that has not yet been tarnished or broken by the world and its troubles. In the Scherzo, the youth has grown and is now stronger and ready for the hardships of life. Mahler described the Blumine movement (which was later removed) as a “love episode.” About the *Todtenmarsch* he said, “Now he (my hero) has found a hair in his soup, and his meal is spoiled.”[14] He eventually dispensed with the title “Titan” for the symphony because he was “constantly asked to explain how ‘various situations from the novel were interpreted in the music.’”[15]

The First Symphony possibly sprang from an affair Mahler had in 1887-8 with Frau von Weber, Captain Carl von Weber’s wife. (It was, in fact, only a short affair, that is rarely mentioned by his biographers.) Mahler said that the symphony had been inspired by a passionate love, but “the symphony begins where the love-affair ends; it is based on the affair which preceded the symphony in the emotional life of the composer. But the extrinsic experience became the occasion not the message of the work.”[16] Mahler’s life and Mahler’s work cannot easily be separated. He never lost or forgot what he had experienced, and often it comes out in his music, even if it only gives “the occasion and not the message” for the work.

The First, as well as most of the rest of his symphonies, was not understood, which Mahler was painfully aware of. He wrote to his wife of his frustration in 1903, “I played my First with the orchestra… Several times I had chills running down my back. Confound it, where do people have their ears and hearts that they don’t get this!”[17] It was mainly the funeral march that they did not understand. Mahler used the tune “Bruder Martin” in round to convey “The Hunter’s Funeral

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[13] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 32.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Blaukopf, *Mahler,* 74-75.

[17] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 2nd ed., (Amsterdam, 1949), 285; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies,* 28.

Procession." This was a well-known Austrian fairy tale of a hunter's funeral accompanied by the animals of the forest. "The funeral march of 'Brother Martin' one has to imagine as being played in a dull manner by a band of very bad musicians…"[18] Mahler wrote to Richard Strauss explaining the character of the Finale, "My intention was simply to represent a battle in which victory is always farthest away at the exact moment when the warrior believes himself to be closest to it. This is the character of every spiritual battle, since it is not so easy to become or to be a hero."[19] Mahler's hero is thrown into the midst of a battle alone and he can only be victorious in death. It is interesting here that Mahler nearly quotes verbatim the "Hallelujah Chorus" of Handel's *Messiah* at "He shall reign forever and ever." Mahler uses this triumphant music not to give glory to God to whom it belongs, but to praise the Titan for being triumphant in the end.

The Second Symphony, "Resurrection"

"Synthesis is the essence of Mahler's philosophy in his [early] symphonies, combining in a uniquely personal manner philosophical concepts, ecstatic confessions, expressionist outburst, and the poetic innocence of *Wunderhorn* Romanticism."[20] This is exactly what Mahler did in his Second Symphony. He included one song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*Urlicht*) and orchestrated another (*Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt*) without the text. The Second Symphony also incorporates some Christian doctrine, as evidenced by the title "Resurrection." There are even a few references to Scripture in the Finale. We must look at his worldview, particularly about death and resurrection, in order to understand this symphony.

The Second maintained a special place in Mahler's affections because of its triumphantly redeeming message and he conducted it at significant times in his life. It was the first and last of his works that he conducted in Vienna (April 9, 1899 and November 24, 1907, respectively) and the first he conducted in Munich, New York and Paris.[21] His final performance in Vienna was just before he left for New York. This grand farewell was followed by a "veritable hurricane" of applause that moved him to tears.[22]

The program struggle was also present in the Second Symphony. Mahler began with the first movement in 1888 and called it "*Todtenfeier*." In a letter to Max Marschalk he wrote,

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[18] Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Gustav Mahler in the memory of Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, Diary entries, ed. Herbert Killian, (Hamburg, 1984), 174; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 40.

[19] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 43.

[20] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 104.

[21] Edward R. Reilly, "*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, ed. Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson, 84-125. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 90.

[22] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 217.

> It may interest you to know that it is the hero of my D major symphony that I bear to his grave, and whose life I reflect, from a higher vantage point, in a clear mirror. Here too the question is asked: What did you live for? Why did you suffer? Is it all only a vast, terrifying joke? – We have to answer these questions somehow if we are to go on living – indeed, even if we are only to go on dying! The person in whose life this call has resounded, even if it was only once, must give answer. And it is this answer I give in the last movement.[23]

After the first movement, Mahler called for "a pause of at least five minutes" to prepare for the memory of "a blissful moment in the life of the dear departed." It is the "echo of days gone by…when the sun was still brightly shining for him."[24] The second movement, reminiscent of an Austrian Ländler, is that memory of which Mahler speaks. The third movement conveys the "spirit of unbelief" where Mahler said the "world and life become a dismal noise."[25] It is Mahler's orchestral version of *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* from the *Wunderhorn* collection. St. Anthony of Padua (1195-1231) was a famous Franciscan missionary and preacher, called the "hammer of heretics." In the poem, he finds the church empty and so he goes to the river and preaches to the fish, but they do not really understand and soon leave. "The sermon was splendid, but all remain as they were… And as the holy man turns in dismay there is the distinct whiff of sulfur and brimstone in the air."[26] It is an ironic view of Man's sinister nature, but strikingly similar to Romans 1: "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen…so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him… Therefore God also gave them up…" The fourth movement is the *Wunderhorn* song "Urlicht," set for alto voice and orchestra. It is a childlike expression of faith and provides a bit of rest between the "shrieks" at the end of the third and beginning of the fifth movements. Contemplation of this world turning to consideration of the next is the transition Mahler wanted before the finale. First it considers Man's need and pain and then the desire to be in heaven with God our Creator.

It took Mahler six years to complete the Second Symphony, mainly due to the lack of inspiration for the finale. When it was completed, he knew that he had created a masterpiece. "It is a bold work, majestic in structure. The final climax is colossal…"[27] He wrote to Friedrich Löhr in 1894, "Safe delivery of a strong, healthy last movement of my Second. Father and child both doing as well as can be expected – the latter not yet out of danger."[28] Mahler began with a musicophilosophical idea and then looked for a suitable text: “The last movement of my Second Symphony really obliged me to search through the whole of world literature, including the Bible, in order to find the liberation word.”[29] At last, Mahler found inspiration. He attended the funeral of Hans von Bülow in March 1894 and a chorale intoned Friedrich Klopstock’s *Aufersteh’n* (“Resurrection”). “It was as if I had been struck by lightning, everything suddenly seemed crystal clear!”[30] He added six stanzas of his own to the existing three. Much of Mahler’s added text was in fact inspired by biblical texts. 1 Corinthians 15:36 says: “Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies.” Mahler’s “Die I will, so that I might live!” comes from this verse. And 15:55 asks: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” In 1900, Mahler reflected to Natalie Bauer-Lechner, “I will probably almost never attain such heights or plumb such depths again… Only once or twice in a lifetime is it possible to create works on themes so stupendous.”[31]

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[23] Reilly, "*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 93.

[24] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 62.

[25] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 101.

[26] Paul Hamburger, "Mahler and *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 79.

[27] Reilly, "*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 89.

[28] Ibid.

Mahler felt compelled to write programs for the different performances of the Second, although as previously mentioned, he grew less fond of program music as time went on. “Just as I find it banal to compose program music, I regard it as unsatisfactory and unfruitful to try to want to make program notes for a piece of music.”[32] He wrote to Alma in frustration over having to write program notes:

> …My Almschi! Justi (Mahler’s sister Justine Rose) did not tell you, then, that I only drew up the program as a crutch for a cripple (you know whom I mean [according to Alma’s *Memories*, King Albert of Saxony is indicated]). It only gives a superficial indication, all that any program can do for a music work, let alone this one, which is so much all of a piece that it can no more be explained than the world itself. – I’m quite sure that if God were asked to draw up a program of the world he had created he could never do it. – At best it would be a ‘revelation’ that would say as little about the nature of God and life as my analysis says about my C minor symphony. In fact, as all revealed religions do, it leads directly to misunderstanding, to a flattening and coarsening, and in the long run to such distortion that the work, and still more, the creator, is utterly unrecognizable…[33]

One of the programs for the Second Symphony, written for a performance in Dresden on December 20, 1901 described it this way:

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[29] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 98.

[30] Gustav Mahler; quoted in Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Reilly, “*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, Appendix 2, 123.

[33] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 274-275; quoted in Reilly, “*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 95.

1st movement. We stand by the coffin of a well-loved person. His life, struggles, passions and aspirations once more, for the last time, pass before our mind's eye. – And now in this moment of gravity and of emotion which convulses our deepest being, when we lay aside like a covering everything that from day to day perplexes us and drags us down, our heart is gripped by a dreadfully serious voice which always passes us by in the deafening bustle of daily life: What now? What is this life – and this death? Do we have an existence beyond it? Is all this only a confused dream, or do life and this death have a meaning? – And we must answer this question if we are to live on.

The next 3 movements are conceived as intermezzi.

2nd movement. – Andante: a happy moment from the life of his beloved departed one and a sad recollection of his youth and lost innocence.

3rd movement. – Scherzo: the spirit of unbelief, of presumption, has taken possession of him, he beholds the tumult of appearances and together with the child's pure understanding he loses the firm footing that love alone affords; he despairs of himself and of God. The world and life become for him a disorderly apparition; disgust for all being and becoming lays hold of him with an iron grip and drives him to cry out in desperation.

4th movement Urlicht (alto solo). The moving voice of naïve faith sounds in his ear.

> "I am of God, and desire to return to God!
> God will give me a lamp, will light me unto the life of eternal bliss!"

5th movement.

We again confront all the dreadful questions and the mood of the end of the 1st movement. – The voice of the caller is heard: the end of all living things is at hand, the last judgment is announced, and [all] the whole horror of that day of days has set in. – The earth trembles, graves burst open, the dead arise and step forth in endless files. The great and the small of this earth, kings and beggars, the just and the ungodly – all are making that pilgrimage; the cry for mercy and grace falls terrifyingly on our ear. – The crying becomes ever more dreadful – our senses forsake us and all consciousness fades at the approach of eternal judgment. The "*great summons*" is heard; the trumpets from the Apocalypse call [every body and every soul]; -- in the midst of the awful silence we think we hear in the farthest distance a nightingale, like a last quivering echo of earthly life! Softly there rings out a chorus of the holy and the heavenly: "Rise again, yea thou shalt rise again!" There appears the glory of God! A wonderful gentle light permeates us to our very heart – all is quiet and blissful! – And behold: there is no judgment. – There is no sinner, no righteous man – no great and no small. – There is no punishment and now reward! An almighty feeling of love illumines us with blessed knowing and being![34]

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[34] Reilly, "*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, Appendix 2, 124-125.

"Even if we did not have the text of this section, we could conclude from the motivic relations that in Mahler's imagination the true Apocalypse was nothing other than the message of the Second Coming."[35] These motivic relations refer to the four trumpets of the Apocalypse, the rumble of the graves opening, the eternity motive and possibly the motivic connection to the First Symphony's final octave leap, which is repeated in augmentation in the trumpets at the end of the Second (see musical examples 1 and 2).

Another program describes it thus: "The first movement depicts the titanic struggles of a mighty being still caught in the toils of this world; grappling with life and with the fate to which he must succumb – and his death. The second and third movements… are episodes from the life of the fallen hero." And of the finale he wrote a similar description to the one, but concluded by saying "the words themselves are sufficient commentary. And…I absolutely refuse to give another syllable of explanation!"[36]

The "voice of the caller" of which Mahler speaks in his Dresden program possibly refers to Isaiah 40:3:

> The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
> "Prepare the way of the Lord;
> Make straight in the desert
> A highway for our God."

He also likely received inspiration from the *Wunderhorn* poem "Herald of the Final Judgment." The four trumpets that sound from "opposite directions" refers to Matthew 24:31, where it states that the Lord will "gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

We see that unlike the Christian or Jewish God, Mahler's does not judge. He was unable to accept a God who would condemn some of His creation to Hell. He used a *Dies irae* motive in the Finale, along with a *Wunderhorn* text and the poem of Klopstock, (see text appendix) but removed these Christian texts from their original contexts to present a creed for all of humanity. All of the references in the text are to God and not Christ. Although a variant text of "Urlicht" connects the symbol of the rosebud with Christ, the *Wunderhorn* version used by Mahler does not. Instead of specifically "dogmatic doctrine," Mahler addresses the human fears of death and judgment. And "not just damnation, but judgment of the worth of one's life,"[37] and the need to feel that life has real meaning. The grave and Death are beaten because resurrection is certain. Life and toil do become meaningful and suffering is not in vain. Revelation 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on… that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." The eternity motive in the end symbolizes the hope for the resurrection to eternal life (see musical examples 3 and 4). This symphony reaches so many so deeply because it deals with the problems that all of us wrestle with – that of death, resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ.

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[35] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 75.

[36] Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Recollections of Gustav Mahler,* trans. Dika Newlin, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 43-44.

[37] Reilly, "*Todtenfeier* and the Second Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 121.

The Third Symphony

The Third Symphony continues in the *Wunderhorn* tradition, but is a stark contrast to the Second Symphony. It borders on pantheism in its admiration and near-worship of Nature. Sometimes Mahler called it his "Pan Symphony." "My Symphony will be unlike anything the world has ever heard! All of nature speaks in it, telling secrets that one might guess only in a dream."[38] There is a tiered view of nature in this symphony: plant, animal, human and angel worlds all viewed from the perspective of eternal love, which Mahler called "the highest reality – the source of all being."[39] The final movement, *Was mir die Liebe erzählt* ("What love tells me"), gives the work a religious and moral focus.

The Third Symphony was received with some hostility upon its first few hearings. After the second performance on December 13, 1895, Bruno Walter claimed, "To be sure, there was hostility, misunderstanding, belittlement, scorn. Yet the work left such a deep impression of greatness and originality of the force of Mahler's personality, that one may date his rise to fame as a composer from that day."[40] The hostility led Mahler to exclaim, "When the hounds bay, we know we are in the saddle!"[41]

The program for the symphony, which Mahler later took away, emphasized his own personal thoughts and emotions in what certain things "tell *me*."

"A Summer Noonday's Dream"
1st Section
Introduction: Pan Awakes

1. "Summer marches in"

2nd Section

2. "What the flowers of the meadow tell me"
3. "What the beasts of the forest tell me"
4. "What man tells me"
5. "What the angels tell me"
6. "What love tells me"[42]

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[38] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 83.

[39] Ibid., 88.

[40] Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 119.

[41] Ibid., 110.

[42] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

There was originally supposed to be a seventh movement entitled "What the child tells me," but instead that became the finale of the Fourth Symphony. Mahler wrote to Anna von Mildenburg in 1896 about this original seventh movement,

> It is the zenith, the highest level from which the world can be viewed. I could also name the movement something like "What God Tells Me," in the sense that God can only be comprehended as "love." In this sense, my work is a musical poem, ascending step by step, encompassing all steps of evolution. It begins with lifeless nature and rises up to the love of God![43]

He also told Natalie Bauer-Lechner that he could have called the first movement "What the Mountains Tell Me," in line with the way of thinking of the world as coming up from nothing.[44]

Mahler claimed that his program for this symphony was in part evolution. He wrote Richard Batka in 1896,

> No one will hear, of course, that nature encompasses everything that is eerie, great, and even lovely (this is precisely what I wanted to express using the whole work as a kind of evolutionistic development). It always seems strange to me that most people, when they talk about nature, can think only of flowers, little birds, forest fragrance, etc. No one mentions the god Dionysus or the great Pan. There, now you have a kind of program…a sample of how I make music – always and everywhere only the sound of nature! This seems to be what Bülow once described to me so appropriately as "the symphonic problem." I do not recognize a different kind of program, at least not for my works. If I have now and then given them titles, I wanted to provide sign posts for the emotion, for the imagination. If words are needed to achieve this, then the human, articulated voice is there, which can then realize the boldest intentions, precisely in connection with the illuminating word! Here it is the world, nature as a whole, that is awakened out of unfathomable silence and sings and rings.[45]

Mahler's literary inspiration for the program probably came from Siegfried Lipiner's poem entitled "Genesis."[46] Both are conceived as cosmogonic dreams. The poem is a vision of a large cloud beginning to speak and creating the world. Mahler's program shows the same order of creation as that in Lipiner's poem. Mahler also includes the spirit world, believing that angels intercede between man and God. And while Lipiner only generally speaks of love, Mahler deals with "eternal love," which he equated with God.

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[43] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 91.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Herta Blaukopf, ed. *Gustav Mahler Letters*, Vienna: Publications of the International Gustav Mahler Society, 1982), 180; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 90.

[46] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 90.

At times, Mahler thought of possibly naming the symphony "*My* Happy Science" in response to Nietzsche's book, *The Happy Science*. He was reading Nietzsche at the time of composing the Third. Mahler, while assimilating some of Nietzsche's ideas, took what he had to say and offered a rebuttal to it, of sorts. Mahler believed that love, compassion and child-like faith were all serious and important, in fact necessary, to human life. Nietzsche denied these sentiments and even laughed at them. Nietzsche thought of love as a terribly unashamed statement of arrogance while Mahler took Schopenhauer's idea that all love is selfless compassion. Referring to heaven, a statement in *Also Sprach Zarathustra* reads, "Surely, unless you become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven… But we do not want the kingdom of heaven. We have become men – thus we want the earthly kingdom."[47] Obviously, Mahler's program displayed longing for the kingdom of heaven with his original intent to end the symphony with "The Heavenly Life."

The fourth movement text was taken from Nietzsche's "Midnight Song" from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. But what Mahler took was determined by the preconceived aims of his symphony and had nothing to do with the "superman" that Nietzsche wrote about. It was not a "Nietzsche Symphony." As previously mentioned, Nietzsche's doctrine of the "superman" came from his belief that God is "dead." And even though he never truly embraced him, Mahler had completely rejected Nietzsche by 1900. Of course, the Third Symphony was completed in 1895. The text that Mahler took actually speaks of death and the longing for eternity. Mahler even quotes the eternity motive from the Second Symphony in the horns accompanying the text "…tiefe Ewigkeit" (deep eternity) (see musical example 5). In the context of the third and fifth movements, the message of the fourth fits well as part of the overall message of unity and the world's oneness. The third movement's music and the fifth movement's text come from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*; the third movement came straight from "Ablösung im Sommer," and the fifth used "Poor Children's Begging Song," (see text appendix). The text of this poem speaks of three angels in heaven rejoicing that Peter was set free from sin. This and heavenly joy was prepared for him and all by Jesus for their salvation. "Only love God forever!"

The Fourth Symphony

The Fourth is the smallest in proportion and least overshadowed by darkness of all Mahler's symphonies. It also returns to some Christian ideas, especially in the finale, *Das himmelische Leben* ("The heavenly life") from the *Wunderhorn* collection (see text appendix). The plan of the symphony was conceived in retrospect from this preconceived finale. The cycle is also backwards, going from "Experience" in the first movement to "Innocence" in the finale.[48] It is a child's view of heaven, with a very naïve emphasis on the abounding food and drink. The finale looks back and tells us what the first three movements were about. Theodor Adorno called it “music about music”.[49] Adorno also said, “The composition has swallowed the program…”[50] Mitchell fittingly remarks, “is it not the case in the Fourth… of [the] *symphony* swallowing the *composer*?”[51] But there does seem to be a hidden program to the whole symphony, although not fully revealed.

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[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, part 4, 824; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 91.

[48] Donald Mitchell, "'Swallowing the Programme:' Mahler's Fourth Symphony" in *The Mahler Companion*, 205.

By the time of the Fourth Symphony, Mahler was well on his way to completely rejecting program music. In Munich in October 1900, he publicly renounced program music. He complained about the audiences’ misunderstanding of his music and continued to be exasperated by the listeners’ inability to hear the music because they were trying to hear the descriptive account. He said of his Fourth, “They are already so corrupted by program music… that they are no longer capable of understanding a work simply as a piece of music! This disastrously mistaken attitude stems from Liszt and Berlioz. They, at least, were talented, and gained new means of expression in this way. But now that we have these means at hand, who needs the crutches any more?”[52] Walter wrote, “No program will lead one to an understanding of this work, nor any other Mahler symphony. It is absolute music and non literary from beginning to end: a four movement symphony, each movement organic in itself, and completely accessible to anyone who is responsive to subtle humor.”[53] Perhaps Walter was less than objective in this case, trying to redeem Mahler from the “programmatic hole” he had dug for himself in the first three symphonies. Floros claims the opposite saying, “it is not an exaggeration to say that a full understanding of the Symphony is impossible without the knowledge of the program.”[54]

Though he never completely revealed that program, it was shared in conversations with friends. Remarks to Natalie Bauer-Lechner, Bruno Walter and his wife suggest that the work is about mediations on “life after death.”[55] It is somewhat eschatological and so is similar to the Second. Here again, he quotes the eternity motive in the violins at the end of the third movement (see musical example 6). Mahler explained this to Bauer-Lechner saying, “It contains the cheerfulness of a higher and, to us, an unfamiliar world that holds for us something eerie and horrifying. In the final movement (“The Heavenly Life”), although already belonging to this higher world, the child explains how everything is meant to be.”[56] It is the heavenly life as described through the eyes of “an Austrian child of Catholic upbringing.”[57]

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[49] Theodor Adorno, *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Bloomster (London: Sheed and Ward, 1973), 183-4; quoted in Mitchell, “’Swallowing the Programme:’ Mahler’s Fourth Symphony” in *The Mahler Companion*, 204.

[50] Adorno, *Mahler*, 54; quoted in Mitchell, “’Swallowing the Programme:’ Mahler’s Fourth Symphony” in *The Mahler Companion*, 188.

[51] Mitchell, “’Swallowing the Programme:’ Mahler’s Fourth Symphony” in *The Mahler Companion*, 198.

[52] Peter Franklin, “A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics, and Mahler’s Third Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 171.

[53] Bruno Walter, Letters 1894-1962, ed. Lotte Walter Lindt (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969), 50; quoted in Franklin, “A Stranger’s Story: Programmes, Politics, and Mahler’s Third Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 173.

[54] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 113.

[55] Ibid.

Walter later contradicted his statement about the absolute nature of this symphony and explained the first three movements as describing “a heavenly life.”

> In the first movement, one could imagine a man getting to know this life… Life is bright and delightful and at times touchingly human. The second movement might be called “Friend Death is Striking Up the Dance”… [“The Smile of St. Ursula”] could be the title of the third movement. The most serious of all saints is laughing, so cheerful is this life… Solemn rest and serious, gentle cheerfulness characterize this movement, but it also contains deep, painful contrast, like reminiscences of earthly life… If someone wonders what all this is about, a child answers in the fourth… movement: That is “The Heavenly Life.”[58]

The subject of the Fourth is very subtle and delicate, so it is no wonder that Mahler himself hesitated to give names to the individual movements and never completely disclosed the program. Bauer-Lechner wrote:

> Mahler no longer wants to consider naming the individual movements of the work, as he did in earlier times. “I could think of some beautiful names for them, but I am not about to tell those nincompoops, the critics, and audiences; they would only misunderstand and twist them in the silliest ways!”[59]

The Fifth Symphony

“The Fifth is a cursed work. No one comprehends it.”[60] With the Fifth Symphony, Mahler bid farewell to the style of writing that had characterized his first four symphonies. He said farewell to *Wunderhorn* and the very technique of composing after songs. With the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, Mahler returned to the Viennese tradition that he felt a close connection to and the need to carry on. "With them he was able to prove himself the true heir of Haydn and Mozart, to Beethoven, Schubert and Bruckner."[61] He began to develop a new orchestral idiom using familiar fanfares and marches, dances and songs in a new melodic syntax and polyphony. This new style, however, frustrated him, particularly with his Fifth, for the rest of his life. As late as 1911, he was reorchestrating his Fifth. In a letter to Georg Göhler in 1911 Mahler wrote:

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[56] Bauer-Lechner, *Gustav Mahler in the memory of Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, 198; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 113.

[57] Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 67.

[58] Bruno Walter, Letters 1894-1962, ed. Lotte Walter Lindt (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1969), 50; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 114.

[59] Bauer-Lechner, *Gustav Mahler in the memory of Natalie Bauer-Lechner*, 163; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 115.

[60] Gustav Mahler; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 139.

> "I have finished my Fifth – it had to be almost completely reorchestrated. I simply can't understand why I still had to make such mistakes, like the merest beginner. It is clear that all the experience I had gained in writing the first four symphonies completely let me down in this one – for a completely new style demanded a new technique."[62]

So why did Mahler lose his nerve and ability in orchestrating the Fifth? Most likely it was the fact that he had "swallowed the program" in the Fourth. In letters, he was convinced that no one would understand the Fifth. The rejection of the overt program left him insecure and exposed, so he over-orchestrated to compensate. Mahler's trademark transparency was lost in his attempt to convey his message with grand orchestration. Alma complained that he had composed a symphony for percussion. Donald Mitchell wrote that the revision was more "a process of revelation than correction."[63]

In February 1901, Mahler had a near-fatal hemorrhage. He began the Fifth a few months later and, in it, death is not romanticized as in the Fourth, but is very near. The fact that the symphony opens with a funeral march accentuates this nearness and fearfulness. The second theme of the violins in the first movement is related to the first song of the *Kindertotenlieder* and to the *Wunderhorn* song *Der Tamboursg'sell* ("The Drummer"). The latter is about the thoughts of a drummer boy who is about to be executed, but "divorced from its romantic context, it becomes a meditation on the universal fact of death."[64] Part I ends in defeat, but "if [it] were to end in consolation or triumph, we should have no need of the rest of the symphony… There can be no defeat if hope has not been created, thence to be suppressed."[65] Thus, the main idea of the Fifth is to overcome and conquer, to give the image of immortality. Part I is a contest between Life and Death. Parts II and III are response to that contest. Mahler often quoted Part I in Parts II and III.

Mahler said of the third movement:

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[61] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[62] Donald Mitchell, "Emptiness or Nothingness? Mahler's Fifth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 270.

[63] Ibid., 284.

[64] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[65] Mitchell, "Emptiness or Nothingness? Mahler's Fifth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 249.

> The Scherzo is an accursed movement! It will have a long history of suffering! For fifty years conductors will take it too fast and make nonsense of it. The public – oh, heavens – how should it react to this chaos that is eternally giving birth to a world that then perishes in the next moment, to these primordial sounds, to this blustering, bellowing, roaring ocean, to these dancing stars, to these shimmering, flashing, breathing waves?[66]

The Scherzo has sometimes been called the "horn concerto" that Mahler never wrote. He called for an obligato horn accompanied by four horns and orchestra.

The Adagietto caused much controversy in Mahler's day. Adorno dismissed it as *kulinarische Sentimentalität* (lit. "cooked-up sentiment") and said it "borders on genre prettiness through its ingratiating sound."[67] Richard Strauss said that his pleasure with the performance was only slightly dimmed by it, but saw that it pleased the audience the most. Truly, it is a beautiful movement of which Willem Mengelberg wrote, "This Adagietto was Gustav Mahler's declaration of love to Alma!"[68] This he claimed to have "from the both of them." Perhaps neither Strauss nor Adorno knew that this was what Mahler was saying, and so they dismissed the sentimentality. Mengelberg's claim gains credibility when we see that Mahler quotes the "gaze theme" from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* several times (see musical example 7a). Floros states that because Alma was a good musician and composer, she was bound to get the hint of this quote. It was written about the time of their engagement in December 1901. They were married March 9, 1902. Mitchell calls the Adagietto a "wordless Rückert song… for strings and harp."[69] The interpretation of it as a song leads to a faster tempo because "no singer could possibly sustain [a slower] tempo… It's a point conductors might bear in mind, although I don't expect any will."[70] Leonard Bernstein conducted only the Adagietto at Robert Kennedy's funeral Mass in 1968 and used a very slow tempo, interpreting it as a mournful piece. But if it truly was a love song to Alma, it certainly cannot be mournful!

The Rondo-Finale is the counterpart to the Funeral March of the first movement. The pain and lament of that movement is opposed by cheerfulness in the Finale. Adorno roughly criticized the movement and spoke of the emotional extremes Mahler went to. "Mahler was a bad yes-man. His voice breaks like Nietzsche's when he proclaims values, when he himself practices this disgusting concept of 'overcoming,' pounced on by musical analysts. He makes music as though joy ruled the world."[71] The Rondo-Finale was thematically linked to the Adagietto, joining it to form Part III of the symphony. But Mahler transforms the longing themes of the Adagietto into graceful and joyful figures. He also treated the chorale theme with playfulness. He was happily married and probably did feel that "joy ruled the world." Floros writes, "When, in the summer of 1902, he composed the Rondo-Finale…he was in a very euphoric mood because he strongly believed he had found the greatest happiness of his life."[72]

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[66] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 139.

[67] Mitchell, "Emptiness or Nothingness? Mahler's Fifth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 308.

[68] Ibid., 315.

[69] Ibid., 312.

[70] Ibid., 313.

[71] Adorno, *Physiognomic*, 49; quoted by Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 156.

The Sixth Symphony, "Tragic"

Mahler's Sixth Symphony is sometimes referred to as "Tragic" (a title Mahler himself gave it and later revoked) because of the prophetic nature that has been associated with it. Mahler was outwardly happy at this time (1903-4), but the last two *Kindertotenlieder* were written at this time, as well as the tragic finale of the Sixth. He composed it in Maiernigg on the Wörthersee, where he, Alma and their two girls spent the summers between seasons at the Vienna Court Opera. In spite of being eighty minutes in length, the Sixth is the most classical of all Mahler's works, using both correct movement order and a classical key relationship between movements. Interesting enough, there are virtually no A minor symphonies prior to this, except for Mendelssohn's Third, which ends in A major. It is very autobiographical and programmatic in nature, although it has widely been regarded as absolute music. Alma reports that "We both cried at the time; we felt so deeply what this music meant… The Sixth is his most personal work and is also a prophetic one."[73] It is interesting that Mahler would give this symphony the title "Tragic," for he is "widely regarded as altogether a 'tragic' composer."[74] Six of his eleven symphonic works (1, 2, 3, 5, 7 and 8) end in triumph and major keys. The fourth calmly passes into bliss and the final trilogy of *Das Lied von der Erde*, the Ninth and Tenth end in peaceful acceptance and reconciliation, again in major keys. Only the Sixth ends in minor, offering no escape and no hope.

Throughout the symphony, there is a "Fate" motive and a "Redemption" motive, or "Alma theme" (see musical example 7b) in opposition to each other. "I have tried to capture you in a theme; I do not know whether I have been successful. You will have to put up with it."[75] These two themes battle for supremacy throughout. The "Alma theme" blasted in A major triumphs over the "Fate" theme, which has just "let all hell loose" in the first movement. Mahler uses cowbells in the Ländler-like music that represented to him the last terrestrial sounds heard in the high mountain peaks. In the third movement, the cowbells are heard again “in an extended pastoral section, like some idealized Ländler, Mahler abandons the physical world.”[76]

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[72] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 159.

[73] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 163.

[74] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 84.

[75] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 163.

The Finale of the Sixth is considered by some to be some of Mahler’s greatest music. Adorno called it “the center of Mahler’s œuvre.” Alma described it this way: “In the last movement he described himself and his downfall or, as he later said, his hero: ‘It is the hero on whom fall three blows of faith, the last of which fells him as a tree is felled.’”[77] Paul Bekker said these three hammer blows represent “an interference by something outside this world, something of a supernatural, crushing effect that mankind can no longer fight against.”[78]

These three blows strangely signify major and terrible events in Mahler’s life. In the spring of 1907, he resigned from the Vienna Court Opera after 10 years (the “Golden Age” of the Vienna Opera). In July, his elder daughter, Maria Anna died of scarlet fever, and he was soon diagnosed with a fatal heart disease after a heart attack. Of course, Mahler composed the symphony three years before any of these events took place. He then became so superstitious about the three blows of the hammer, that he removed the third one from the score. (The blows occur at the collapse of the second statement of the exultant D major second subject at bar 336, the similar collapse of this theme in A major at bar 479 and at the “entrance of the motto following his last and most desperate attempt to sustain A major” at bar 783 – see musical examples 8-10)[79] However, removing the third blow makes little or no musical sense. Norman Del Mar says, “Fate cannot still be felt to stand threateningly over the composer who has been dead and beyond her menace, real or imaginary, for [80 years]. Superstition must play no further part in what is now primarily an artistic decision.”[80] Mahler may have become fearful of these hammer blows and the significance they came to hold in his own life, but we do not believe anymore that a composer can prophesy his future in his own music. Mahler was less than objective about his removal of the third blow and performance practice today should not reflect this falter on his part.

Mahler was perhaps inspired to include these hammer blows by Alexander Ritter’s poem on which Richard Strauss’s *Death and Transfiguration* is based. It includes these verses:

Now booms the final blow
By the iron hammer of death,
Breaking in two the earthly body,

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[76] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[77] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 84.

[78] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 162.

[79] David Matthews, “The Sixth Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 375.

[80] Norman Del Mar, *Mahler’s Sixth Symphony*, 152; quoted by Matthews, “The Sixth Symphony,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 375.

Covering the eye with the night of death.[81]

But Strauss, a disciple of Friedrich Nietzsche, would have never thought to describe *his own* downfall in a symphonic work.

Alma later wrote of Mahler's apprehension toward the Finale,

> None of his works moved him so deeply at its first hearing as this… When [the dress rehearsal] was over, Mahler walked up and down in the artists' room, sobbing, wringing his hands, unable to control himself… On the day of the concert Mahler was so afraid that his agitation might get the better of him that out of shame and anxiety he did not conduct the symphony well. He hesitated to bring out the dark omen behind this terrible last movement.[82]

The piece ends in a doomed coda – a dissonant fugato for horns, trombones and tuba. "My Sixth will be asking riddles that can be solved only by a generation that has received and digested my first five."[83] The finale is truly tragic, unlike anything that preceded it, by Mahler or anyone else. It is not like the fate struggle of Beethoven's Fifth or the despair of Tchaikovsky's Sixth, but is "a truly tragic catastrophe,"[84] like a Shakespearean drama. Matthews states, "I have always been astonished that audiences can bring themselves to applaud this ending, to which silence would seem the only appropriate response."[85]

The Seventh Symphony

Paul Bekker said that the journey from the Sixth to the Seventh Symphony was one of "dark to light." He also stated, "The soul is stirred in its depth; it has proclaimed its joy and pain; and now it simply wants to sing again. The lonely one returns to nature, to the world, to man. This is the origin of the Seventh Symphony."[86] Many spoke of the Seventh as a Romantic symphony. Bruno Walter said, "In the middle three movements of the Seventh, meaningfully and humanly revealing, we hear music embodying a romanticism that we thought had been overcome."[87] However, the Seventh is the least well known of Mahler's symphonies and those who do know it well do not usually offer great praise for it. Arnold Schoenberg did praise it in a letter, saying he had the "impression of perfect repose based on perfect harmony."[88]

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[81] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 163.

[82] Matthews, "The Sixth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 373.

[83] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 161.

[84] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 85.

[85] Matthews, "The Sixth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 375.

[86] Peter Revers, "The Seventh Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 384.

[87] Walter, *Gustav Mahler* (1957 ed.), 92; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 192.

For the premiere of the Seventh in Prague, some of Mahler's friends suggested that the first movement, or even the whole symphony, could be titled *Nachtwanderung* ("Walk by Night"). "The three-movement intermezzo could be called 'Voices of the Night' and 'Into the Morning' might describe the final movement."[89] Mahler, however, was against giving a name to the entire symphony and did not want the symphony to be misinterpreted as program music. It was a "neo-classical" work that was pure music with no program.

The middle three movements (the two Nocturnes with the Scherzo in between) are generally accepted as the heart of the symphony. Mahler used the mandolin and celesta in his Nocturne movements. They are truly beautiful expressions of the night, but with no particular thing or event in mind. The Scherzo, marked *schattenhaft* ("shadowlike") is sinister and nocturnal, even demonic, but less heavy than that of the Sixth. Deryck Cooke refers to "things that go bump in the night."[90] As a whole, however, the Seventh is "music in which human resilience, charm and humor are celebrated."[91] The finale was understood by many to be an expression of "glad, sun-happy, lighthearted joyfulness" and a "piece full of blinding daylight."[92] Theodor Adorno "admired the 'negativeness' of Mahler's music and was offended by the positiveness of this Finale,"[93] just as he was "disgusted" with the Finale of the Fifth. Cooke, among others, views the finale as somewhat of a failure because Mahler's natural tendency was not toward the classical, but to heart-felt romanticism. The finale is a less-than-convincing classical movement. Mahler was himself somewhat removed from or standing outside the music and was unable to be completely convincing in this manner. Part of the problem with this symphony also might be that it fails to answer the nihilism of the Sixth. It almost completely ignores the pain of the Sixth.

Floros writes of the Rondo-Finale:

> The panegyrical tone of the Rondo-Finale, the distinct rondo-like structure of the movement, and the fact that the ritornello returns no less than seven times lead to the conclusion that Mahler understood the movement as a parable for the eternal return… "Nietzsche wrote that the basic concept" of Zarathustra is the "thought of eternal return, the highest form of affirmation ever to be achieved." This thought is poetically expressed in the chapter "The

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[88] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 88.

[89] Specht, *Mahler's Seventh Symphony*, 1; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 191.

[90] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 89.

[91] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[92] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 206.

[93] Ibid., 207.

> Seven Seals" from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*… Of the seven lines that make up each of the seven verses of the poem, the final three express belief in the eternal return…"[94]

Mahler commented that he appreciated Nietzsche's poetry, which is very interesting considering that he had completely rejected his philosophy by this time. He seemed to be referring to both the structure and even the content of the poetry. Again here, Mahler was affirming Nietzsche's references to eternity. This was what Mahler was always concerned with after all, and in his mind, Nietzsche just happened to say it well.

The Eighth Symphony ("Symphony of a Thousand" – not Mahler's title)

"I have just completed my Eighth – it is my greatest work to date. And so unusual in content and form that one cannot describe it in a letter. Imagine the whole universe beginning to sing and resound. These are no longer human voices, but coursing planets and suns."[95] Mahler told Richard Specht, "All my previous symphonies are merely the preludes to this one. In the other works everything still was subjective tragedy, but this one is a source of great joy."[96] The Eighth is a synthesis of Christianity and humanism that offers the greatest possible contrast to its predecessor. It returns from the classicism of the middle period to the spiritual world of rediscovery to which Mahler truly belongs. One cannot put the Eighth in a genre; it is in its own genre with no precedent. And it does not fit in Mahler's own middle or late period works, but stands on its own. It is a "titanic affirmation of a man in the prime of life."[97]

The Eighth is said to be the product of a single outburst during the summer of 1906. Mahler claimed that it was the product of only eight weeks from the time the "*Creator Spiritus* took hold of me,"[98] however dated letters say otherwise. "Mahler made a superhuman effort that summer."[99] Alban Berg even kept a piece of toilet paper with sketches Mahler made of the first four bars of the "Chorus Mysticus!"[100] The Eighth seemed to come to Mahler somewhat like the "bolt of lightening" he spoke of in regard to the Second. Alma spoke of the return of his inspiration:

> From the Fifth onwards he found it impossible to satisfy himself; the Fifth was differently orchestrated for practically every performance; the Sixth and Seventh were continually in the

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[94] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 211.

[95] Gustav Mahler, letter to Willem Mengelberg, August 1906; quoted in Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 211.

[96] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 213.

[97] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[98] John Williamson, "The Eighth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 408.

[99] Alma Mahler; quoted in Blaukopf, *Mahler*, 210.

[100] Williamson, "The Eighth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 409.

> process of revision. It was a phase. His self-assurance returned with the Eighth, and although *Das Lied von der Erde* is posthumous I cannot imagine his altering a note in a work so economical in its means of expression.[101]

Mahler did, however, revise the Eighth a bit in order for the text to fit. He rearranged text, adding and taking away, as was his custom, until it fit perfectly.

The problem with the Eighth Symphony is reconciling the medieval hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* with the second part of Goethe's *Faust*. Almost 1000 years separates the two; Hrabanus Maurus wrote *Veni Creator Spiritus* around 809 for a synod in Aachen, while Goethe wrote *Faust* around 1830-1.[102] The link can possibly be found between the early Christian belief in the power of the Spirit and Goethe's symbolic vision of mankind's redemption through love. But this depended on thematic unity of the music and its ability to bridge the gap. He also had in mind the misunderstood "Platonic love." He explained to Alma in a letter:

> The essence of it is really Goethe's idea that all love is generative, creative, and that there is a physical and spiritual generation which is the emanation of this "Eros." You have it in the last scene of *Faust*, presented symbolically… The wonderful discussion between Diotima and Socrates… gives the core of Plato's thought, his whole outlook on the world… The comparison between [Socrates] and Christ is obvious and has arisen spontaneously in all ages… In each case Eros as Creator of the world.[103]

Hans Meyer criticized Mahler's use of these two texts together, thinking it absurd both theologically and poetically. [104] He attacked him on four points:

1. His conception of *Faust* depended on viewing it as a theater piece with an address to the spectators at the end (though Goethe had "prelude in the theater" at the beginning."
2. He "disowned" all Christian interpretation of the ending.
3. He then used Christian motives to construct a profane message in which he also managed to identify himself with Goethe.
4. This profane message sat ill with the setting of *Veni, Creator Spiritus*.

However, Floros points out that Mahler's vision of the "Chorus Mysticus" had as much to do with "the meaning of the world" as with an address to the audience.[105]

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[101] Alma Mahler, *Memories*, 143; quoted in Williamson, "The Eighth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 410.

[102] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 216. Williamson claims that the *Veni* hymn is attributed now to "author unknown." Williamson 408.

[103] Ibid., 227.

[104] Williamson, "The Eighth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 411.

[105] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 227.

For some, the Eighth seemed to present the unity of the two texts through an acknowledged but reconciled antithesis. The *Veni* hymn is old, long gone and quoted as a rejection, and while the Goethe is also gone, one can still relate to it intellectually. Others see that Mahler was intent on unity, synthesizing the two texts with music. Most critics believe that that Mahler achieved a remarkable synthesis. Both texts include thoughts of grace, love and illumination. Mahler achieves spiritual unity between the two parts through musical unity, creating "an instructive and impressive musical exegesis."[106]

The text of *Veni Creator Spiritus* originally had seven verses, symbolically linked to Isaiah 11:2 in which the seven gifts of the Spirit are listed as spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge and fear of the Lord. Mahler's version of the text used seven and a half of the eight total verses. Mahler always had the text in mind while composing. For example, at the word *lumen*, the brighter keys of D, C and G major appear after the previous F major. The focus of the movement is enlightenment and love; this is presented in the recapitulation of themes in the final verse, where the *Accende* theme receives prominence. The eternity motive also comes up again after the text *in secula seculorum* ("through all eternity") at the "Gloria," (see musical example 11).

Part II tells the story of Faust and Gretchen to its end while offering a solution to the "puzzle of this world."[107] Part I is like a cantata and Part II is closer to being a music drama, so while they are thematically linked, they are stylistically different. There are several characters sung by soloists, whereas the first part is for choir or soloist only. Four basic poetic and musical ideas were used in Part II: eternal love, divine grace, earthly inadequacy, and spiritual reincarnation. The *Accende* theme from Part I recurs most frequently, revealing again that enlightenment and love were Mahler's main concerns. The difference in style is representative of Mahler's attempt to bring the two to a middle ground. He portrays the *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, which is a humble prayer for enlightenment, as a huge shout to the heavens for a vision that humanity needs. He interprets *Faust* as a timeless work with the metaphysical meaning of salvation and he intones the last eight lines (the Chorus Mysticus) as a religious chorale. This effort brings the two into reconciliation with one another, while differing somewhat in style.

Faust owed his redemption not only to divine grace, but also to his own endeavor. Goethe said, "This is entirely in harmony with our religious ideas, according to which we are redeemed not only through our own strength, rather through the added divine grace."[108] Goethe apparently believed that grace was added to our effort in order to achieve redemption. Perhaps Mahler, as a converted Catholic, thought similarly. Both Christianity and Goethe's *Faust* connect the idea of eternal love with divine grace, which Mahler was certainly aware of. Both texts share the thought of the earthly dimension of existence and the weakness of the body.

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[106] Ibid., 218.

[107] Ibid., 226.

[108] Ibid., 233.

Mahler dedicated the Eighth to Alma (Meiner Lieben Frau Alma Maria) as a personal hymn of love. In fact, from the Sixth Symphony on, Alma is associated with certain "redemption themes" and in the Eighth with the "Eternal Feminine," which Mahler saw as the destination of rest, compared to the masculine "striving and struggling towards the goal,"[109] (see musical example 12). Mahler wrote to Alma after a visit to Freud in 1910, "For me you have always been the light, the central point!"[110] Erich Trunz, a Goethe commentator, states that God appears to human eyes as male.

> But all earthly things long to return to the highest light and will again be lifted up to it. Here, however, where the godly reveals itself as loving and merciful, human eyes view it as female. Therefore a line leads from the earthly Gretchen to the Una Poenitentium, to the three holy repenting women, to the *Mater Gloriosa*, and into the primeval light of divine strength of love.[111]

Floros said, "It can be considered certain that the dialectic of the ever-manly and ever-womanly played a role in the conception of the Eighth."[112]

Mahler explained the Eighth to Specht in August 1906:

> Within the last three weeks I have completed the sketch for a totally new symphony, something that makes all my other works seem like preparatory efforts. I have never composed anything like this. In content and style it is altogether different from all my other works, and it is surely my greatest accomplishment. I have probably never worked under such compulsion; it was a vision that struck me like lightning. The whole immediately stood before my eyes; I had only to write it down, as if it had been dictated to me… This Eighth Symphony is noteworthy…because it combines two works of poetry in different languages. The first part is a Latin hymn and the second nothing less than the final scene of the second part of *Faust*. Are you surprised? I had longed to combine the hermit scene and the Finale with the *Mater Gloriosa* in a way that would be different from all the sugary, weak ways it has been done… Then the other day I came across an old book. I opened it to the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus*, and immediately the whole thing was there: not only the first theme, but the entire movement. In response to this I could not possibly find anything more beautiful than Goethe's words in the hermit scene! Its form is also something altogether new. Can you imagine a symphony that is sung throughout, from beginning to end? So far I have employed words and the human voice

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[109] Williamson, "The Eighth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 411.

[110] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 237.

[111] Erich Trunz, *Goethe's Faust*, 629; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 237.

[112] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 237.

> merely to suggest, to sum up, to establish a mood. I resorted to them to express something concisely and specifically, which is possible only with words – something that could have been expressed symphonically only with immense breadth. But here the voice is also an instrument. The whole first movement is strictly symphonic in form yet is completely sung. It is really strange that nobody has thought of this before; it is simplicity itself, *The True Symphony*, in which the most beautiful instrument of all is led to its calling. Yet it is used not only as sound, because the voice is the bearer of poetic thoughts.[113]

Das Lied von der Erde, "Symphony for a Tenor and an Alto Voice and Orchestra"

"It is typical for the late works that none closes in a glorifying, affirmative manner, an apotheosis. *Das Lied von der Erde* as well as the first and last movements of the Ninth and the Tenth die away, fade away, subside *pianissimo*. Their codas express the thought of *morendo*. Their endings are, so to speak, ethereal."[114] In 1907, Mahler felt he was nearing the end of his life and had to resort back to his "one indestructible possession," which was his intense love of being alive. The affirmation of the first symphonies would not fit, nor the tragic end of the Sixth. A quiet, resigned acceptance of what was to come was the only thing that would do. But this was no pessimism that Mahler was feeling. It was genuine love for the earth that would continue after he was gone, but that he longed to remain in for a little while longer. His religious faith seemed to fail him in *Das Lied* and he searched for a way to go on without it. In this piece there is a mix of farewell and the sense of being alive.

Das Lied von der Erde is a near perfect synthesis of symphony and song. Mahler did not call it his Ninth Symphony because "no great symphonic writer was to live beyond his Ninth."[115] He instead called it the "Song of the Earth" because it concerns man's life on earth and it culminates in the transfiguration of the relationship between Nature and the soul. "It is the most personal thing I have yet created," he told Bruno Walter.[116] An understanding of this autobiographical nature is essential to understanding. After being diagnosed with a bilateral valvular defect from birth, Mahler was deeply overwhelmed by the feeling of "having to say farewell… In this mood, everything about life appeared to him to be painfully and intensely colored. This mood brought him to the quietly subdued yet hardly bearable words and sounds of his work…"[117] The themes of this work are familiar: love of nature and life, nostalgia, farewell, and the mortality of man, who cannot even enjoy "all the decayed trinkets of this earth" "for a hundred years."[118] According to Alma, Mahler put "all of his sorrow, his fear…into this work."[119]

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[113] Richard Specht quoting Mahler; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 214.

[114] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 242.

[115] Ibid., 244.

[116] Stephen E. Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 441.

[117] Specht, *Gustav Mahler* (1913 ed.), 334; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 244.

The principal concern of *Das Lied* is spiritual rebirth, which is also the root of its orientalism. Mahler took poems from *The Chinese Flute*, a collection of poetry translated by Hans Bethge, and based his songs on them. The Dionysian/Apollonian (Oriental Yin and Yang) contrast of moods is always present: the abandon of the two drinking songs versus "Of Youth," for example. The natural imagery in the poems preceding the finale shows the dualistic nature of the human spirit: day and night, spring and fall, youth and death, intoxication and meditation. The division of male and female voices is also important.[120]

Mahler had been aware of Eastern views since his student days, in which he immersed himself in the philosophy of Arnold Schopenhauer, for whom stilling of the individual will (taken from Buddhism) is the only path to reduction of suffering and mystical rebirth.[121] The philosophy of Gustav Theodor Fechner is also prevalent. Fechner believed that human existence could be divided into three stages: endless sleep before birth, alternate waking and sleeping on earth, and eternal waking. Death is only a transition that should be feared no more than birth. Fechner also rejected the division of saved and damned, as Mahler did in his Second Symphony. These ideas are contrary to Scripture. Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:13 refer to God loving Jacob, but "hating" Esau. Romans elsewhere speaks of the just being saved by faith and of God leaving others to "uncleanness… vile passions… and a debased mind." (Romans 1) Neither Mahler nor Fechner could accept this. He claimed that "people make for themselves the conditions of their future lives," and that the soul continues to develop after death.[122] Fechner said, "The spirit will no longer wander over mountain and field… only to mourn… he will feel new strength and joy… stilled is all restlessness of thought… when man dies…"[123] Compare this to Mahler's text in "Der Abschied:"

I will never more wander on the horizons
My heart is still and awaits its hour!

"The Drinking Song of Earth's Sorrows," movement 1, is bitter, half-drunken and full of nihilistic anxiety: "before we drink the wine, the song of sorrow should burst laughing into our souls, whose gardens lie wasted, whose joy is dried up; hence the brimming cup is worth more than all the kingdoms of the earth!"[124] He deleted three lines from the third stanza of the first movement to preserve the idea of spiritual rebirth; the grinning grave was not compatible with his worldview and was left out. In the second movement, "The Lonely Man in Autumn," the protagonist stands by a lake in autumn and meditates on Nature's withdrawal from blossoming summer to slumber.[125] The poem "Of Youth," the third movement, "presents a carefree world of stylish young people chatting over tea, occasionally writing down a bit of verse, while sitting in a little pavilion on a pond, connected to the bank only by an arching jade footbridge."[126] It borders on parody in the context of the first two movements. The fourth movement, "Of Beauty" is more of this type of reflection by water. Young girls pick lotus flowers while handsome lads "trot along on valiant horses." Presented is the irony of a girl's springtime innocence and longing for love intertwined with sensuality and primitive power uncharacteristic "Of Beauty." Again, we see Apollonian/Dionysian polarity. The fifth movement, "The Drunkard in Spring" is a defiant piece in which even natural beauty is rejected. Spring is in the air, but the drunkard does not care. He can only focus on the troubles of life. "The realization that all striving is in vain drives a person not only to drink but also to indifference toward everything, even toward spring. He drinks excessively in order to forget."[127]

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[118] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 245.

[119] Ibid., 244.

[120] Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde,*" in *The Mahler Companion*, 443-444.

[121] Ibid., 440.

[122] Ibid., 442.

[123] Ibid.

Soon after completing the work, Mahler lent Walter a score of *Der Abschied* ("The Farewell") for study and asked, "What do you think of it? Is that to be endured at all? Will people do away with themselves after hearing it?" He pointed out rhythmic difficulties and joked, "Have you any idea how one is supposed to conduct this? I haven't!"[128] This movement, like the finales to the Ninth and Tenth, simply fade away. "Dying away to nothing" is written over the last few bars of the score.

In the finale, Mahler combined two poems by Meng-Kao-yen and Wang-Wei entitled "In Expectation of the Friend" and "The Friend's Farewell." The second poem refers to the first, as the poets were friends. The friend Mahler expected in the finale, however, is none other than Freund Hein, the specter of death, a phantom who had haunted him for a long time. After his hemorrhage in 1901, Mahler had a vivid dream of walking in moonlight by a mountain lake (the setting of *Der Abschied*):

> He found himself in the midst of a large gathering in a brightly-lit room, when the last of the guests entered – a large man of stiff bearing, faultlessly dressed, and with the air of a man of affairs. But [Mahler] knew: that is Death… The stranger seized him by the arm with an iron

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[124] Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 447-449.

[125] Ibid., 451.

[126] Ibid., 453.

[127] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 260.

[128] Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 458.

> grip and said, 'You must come with me!'… He could not tear himself loose until, by expending all his forces, he threw the nightmare off."[129]

The eternal was extremely important to him and that is conveyed in this finale. Mahler felt Death calling him and was preparing his heart for life after death. At the end of the coda, the word *Ewig* (Eternal) is repeated seven times, which surely must have been symbolic. Just before the coda, when the alto sings *Ewig*, a slight variation of the eternity motive from the Second Symphony is played in the violins, (see musical example 13).

The Ninth Symphony

The Ninth Symphony is the centerpiece of the "death-haunted" "Farewell" trilogy of *Das Lied*, the Ninth and Tenth Symphonies and is filled with anguish and a bitter struggle, but is resolved in the end to poignant acceptance through Mahler's love for the earth and for life. Alban Berg wrote, "It is the expression of an unheard-of love for this earth, the longing to live in peace upon her, Nature, still enjoy her utterly, even to her deepest depths – before Death comes."[130] And Mengelberg regarded the Ninth as Mahler's departure from everything he loved: art, music and life. He claimed that the first movement was his farewell to his loved ones (Alma and his little girl), the second movement was the "Dance of the Dead," the third movement was what he called "Gallows humor," and the fourth movement is the song of Mahler's soul singing farewell, "from his innermost being."[131]

The Ninth has long been thought of as Mahler's last despairing swan song, but in the context of the Tenth Symphony, this is perhaps not completely true. Mahler was not simply a sick man obsessed with death in 1909. In fact, he said to Walter that year, "I am thirstier for life than ever, and find the 'habits of existence' sweeter than ever."[132] He did, however, buy a grave plot in 1909, so his own death was at least on his mind and, as previously mentioned, he felt a deep need to say farewell.

The epic heroic struggles that end in "affirmative breakthroughs" (First, Second, Third, Fifth and Eighth), are gone as well as the shattering of heroic illusion (Sixth). The Ninth simply fades away. It views death as real and omnipotent, but calmly accepts this truth. "If someone wants to learn to weep he should listen to the first movement of this Ninth…"[133] The second movement is a "death dance" that at its end, "one feels that 'the dance is over.'"[134] The third movement is "an outburst of malevolent laughter at the apparent futility of everything." The finale is a heart-broken mood of farewell, but without bitterness. Mahler looks back on life with serenity. He once said, “This symphony says something I have had on the tip of my tongue for the longest time.”[135]

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[129] Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen*, 185-186; quoted in Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 458.

[130] Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 467.

[131] Willem Mengelberg; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 274.

[132] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 106.

[133] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 273.

[134] Bruno Walter; quoted in Hefling, "*Das Lied von der Erde*," in *The Mahler Companion*, 479.

There are many private inscriptions on the score of the Ninth, such as “O days of youth! Vanished! O Love! Scattered!” and “Farewell! Farewell!” in the first movement and “O Beauty! Love! Farewell! Farewell! World! Farewell!” at the end of the finale.[136] Like “Der Abschied,” the Ninth does not conclude, but stops at the threshold “looking questioningly into uncertainty.”[137] Floros said, “With the celestial dying away of the Ninth Symphony, Mahler confessed himself renewed in his belief in a continuation of existence after death.”[138] In fact, the eternity motive shows up here again in the horn near the end of the symphony. It is just a short, varied quotation of that great motive found in so many places, (see musical example 14). Perhaps Mahler’s faith was struggling to find its place once again in the midst of facing his own death, a curious occurrence that his biographers by and large completely miss.

> In asserting his unquenched vitality and praise of life, he raised the passionate, yearning element in the romantic musical language to its highest intensity; but at the same time, in giving vent to the bitterness and irony in his soul, he stepped up the tensions in the more anguished type of romantic expressionism until it exploded into the dissonance of our own time.[139]

After completing *Das Lied*, Mahler sometimes felt that he had warded off the danger of death, but was still unsure of himself. When he completed his Ninth, considering it “in reality” to be his Tenth, this feeling of beating death became a little more prominent. He began work on his Tenth with this feeling. In a memorial speech in 1912, Arnold Schoenberg said, “It seems that the Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must pass away. It seems as if something might be imparted to us in the Tenth which we ought not yet to know, for which we are not yet ready. Those who have written a Ninth stood too near to the hereafter.”[140]

The Tenth Symphony

Mahler’s Tenth Symphony was left unfinished at his death on May 18, 1911. He began composing the Tenth in the summer of 1910 and worked up until September when the Eighth was to be premiered in Munich. Mahler certainly did not expect to die before completing his Tenth, because during the winter, when he normally would have finished the summer's work, he took up revising the Ninth. In August 1910, during the composition of the Tenth, Mahler discovered that the architect Walter Gropius was in love with his wife and he began to fear that he would lose her to him. He went to see Freud, who diagnosed him (of course) with Holy Mary Complex (mother-fixation). Freud said he looked for his mother in every woman and put this pressure especially on Alma.

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[135] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 271.

[136] Hefling, “*Das Lied von der Erde*,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 469.

[137] Adorno, *Mahler*, 138; quoted in Hefling, “*Das Lied von der Erde*,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 470.

[138] Hefling, “*Das Lied von der Erde*,” in *The Mahler Companion*, 490.

[139] Chicago Symphony Orchestra, *Mahler: The Symphonies*.

[140] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 272.

Theodor Adorno and Bruno Walter were both opposed to any completion of Mahler's Tenth being attempted. Walter wrote a letter to Alma explaining his opposition when she allowed completions to be pursued:

> No composer was more resentful than Mahler about allowing an incomplete work to become known – you know this as well as I. I much regret that you disregarded this aversion, deeply rooted in his character and work, and expose to the public a torso that lacks the corrections and finishing touches that only the composer could have provided…"[141]

Adorno said about completing the Tenth,

> Precisely someone who senses the extraordinary scope of the conception of the Tenth ought to do without adaptations and performances. The case is similar with sketches of unfinished pictures by masters: anyone who understands them and can visualize how they might have been completed would prefer to file them away and contemplate them privately, rather than hang them on the wall.[142]

Colin Matthews thinks this view is "little short of monstrous," instead thinking that it should be given to the public. "I can think of few things less attractive than the prospect of a handful of concerned musicologists hugging to themselves the knowledge of a major work."[143] Richard Specht claimed that Mahler spoke of the Tenth as "fully prepared in the sketch" and that the manuscript shows no gap in the musical argument, so it was in effect "complete" with only details remaining. However, only the first two movements were completed as far as Mahler spoke. The others were missing no bars or themes, but Mahler would have reworked it significantly, giving it the orchestrational touch that only the master could give.

Deryck Cooke explains that Mahler went through several stages of composition. He began by writing out a four-stave sketch of the complete work with some indication as to orchestration. Each movement was complete in this stage from beginning to end, although at times on a single thematic line kept the music going. The second stage consisted of elaboration of this draft into a full score.

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[141] Bruno Walter; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 298.

[142] Adorno, *Mahler*; quoted in Matthews, "The Tenth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 491.

[143] Colin Matthews, "The Tenth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, 492.

Mahler died during this stage, leaving the first two movements basically complete and about thirty bars of the third movement.[144]

Even though several completions of the Tenth have been attempted and offered (Joseph Wheeler, Clinton Carpenter, Hans Wollschläger, Deryck Cooke and most recently Remo Mazzetti Jr., an understudy of Carpenter), there are still some who object to the work ever being performed. Deryck Cooke answers this, "Mahler's actual *music*, even in its unrevised and unelaborated state, has such strength and beauty that it dwarfs into insignificance [any] uncertainties."[145] Cooke also claimed that "something like ninety percent" of the harmony and counterpoint "are pure Mahler."[146] He understood that Mahler would make changes in "a thousand details" and Cooke did not wish his work to be seen as a "reconstruction" or "completion," only a manuscript readable and performable. His "completion" has met with the most approval and success of all the attempts. In order to understand the significance of the Tenth Symphony, we must be able to hear it. In 1963, Alma was so moved by Cooke's performing version that she immediately lifted her ban on performance of it and in fact, asked to hear it again.

The first "two movements of the work, an Adagio (which represents a first movement) and an Intermezzo, were completely finished with every instrumental part precisely notated – the sketch could be made into a score without changing a note."[147] The Purgatorio movement had exclamations written in the score quoting Matthew 27:46: *O Gott! O Gott! Warum hast du mich verlassen?* And *Dein Wille geschehe!* Mahler probably composed the Purgatorio about the time that Walter Gropius wrote Alma and asked her to leave everything behind and join him. Mahler read the letter because it was addressed to him and was deeply hurt, fearing he might lose Alma. He told Alma "What you do will be right. Decide for yourself!" Alma later wrote, "But then I did not have a choice!"[148] His quotations of Matthew perhaps reveal that he thought of Purgatory not only as "purification" in the dogmatic sense of the Catholic Church, but that it was also full of suffering and torture. It is possible that Mahler bordered on insanity during the summer of 1910.

The fourth and fifth movement also had notes written in the manuscript: "You alone know what it means. Ah!… Farewell, my music! Farewell…" at the end of the fourth and "To live for you! To die for you! Almschi!" at the end of the fifth. The words "You alone know what it means" refer to a muffled drum beat in the score reminiscent of a funeral procession for a firefighter in New York City that

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[144] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 118-119.

[145] Ibid., 120.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Specht, *Gustav Mahler*, (1925 ed.), 300; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 297.

[148] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 309.

Mahler and Alma witnessed from their 11th floor apartment in which that muffled drum beat was heard and followed by silence. Alma saw Mahler with "his face covered with tears. The scene had made such an impression on him that he used this short beat on the drum in his Tenth Symphony."[149] The words in the fifth movement refer to the coda, which fades tenderly to *pianissimo*. "To live for you! To die for you!" Seven measures before the end, there is a "flaring-up gesture: The melody suddenly rises, reaches an accentuated high note, and slowly sinks back down."[150] Above this music, Mahler wrote his wife's nickname, "Almschi!"

These inscriptions in the score reveal that this symphony was not about death. It was about love for Alma. "There was still plenty of life left in Mahler when death claimed him."[151] Like the Sixth, the Ninth had only been a phase, which Mahler faced and overcame in the Tenth. It was not triumph, but simply a new joy that came after having reckoned so deeply with death. Alma provided that joy for Mahler, even in the midst of their troubles in 1910. The Fifth, Sixth, Eighth and Tenth all present a focus on Alma that reveal Mahler's deep love for her. It now becomes all the more obvious that the Tenth is essential to understanding the Ninth and even Mahler himself.

Gustav Mahler was a romantic in the deepest sense of the word. Everything he saw in the world and loved about the world was translated directly into his music. His worldview *was* his music. His ideals of heroes, heroic ideals, love, tragedy, triumph, life and death, mourning and farewell were the root of his music. The texts he chose for his symphonies always reflected something he already felt and needed to say. He already desired life to be purposeful when he found Klopstock's text, and it was as if he was finally able to articulate what he had thought all along. When he took words from Nietzsche, it was simply because Nietzsche said what Mahler meant. *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* was to Mahler the embodiment of his own thought, which is why he relied so heavily on it. *Veni, Creator Spiritus* and *Faust* were two antithetical views of life and the eternal in which Mahler found reconciliation through his own idea of love. The poems of *Das Lied von der Erde* told of the earth, friends and a farewell what Mahler felt after the "death sentence" from the physician. One cannot separate Mahler's life and Mahler's work. What he saw and did, he brought into his music.

Mahler was religious, but only so far as it suited his view and purpose. Even his belief in God was rooted in something that he thought and wanted. He wanted a God who would not judge, who would not condemn, and who was the ultimate representation of love. I do not believe that Mahler possessed true, saving faith, but instead proclaimed a modern humanistic version of the faith that we hold so dear. Mahler was a well-read man, an intellectual, and he was discerning in his view of the world. But perhaps Mahler laid up for himself “treasures on this earth.” His heart was for this earth and life, but not the eternal life and the new earth that our Father promises through the atoning work of Christ. And yet, eternity was always present in his mind, even in the Ninth, which was the farewell to and song of love for this earth. A little glimmer of eternity, represented by the motive from the Second Symphony, was quoted, usually at the word “eternity,” in all the following symphonies, except Five, Six and Seven, which had no text. For Mahler, it was all wrapped up in his worldview. He could not separate love for this world from the longing for eternity. It is possible that eternity for Mahler was only a continuation of what was good in this life. Jesus repeatedly speaks of eternal life, given by the Father through Him. Revelation 4:8, quoting Isaiah 6:3, speaks of the host of angels singing “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!” Mahler surely was familiar with these promises and descriptions of eternal life. These thoughts must have increased his longing for eternity, but it is never quite the same eternity that he longs for. Scripture describes eternity as being completely focused on the Triune God. Mahler, however, looked at heaven with childlike naiveté, thinking that it would include not only food and drink in abundance, but everyone on earth with no one *ex*cluded.

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[149] Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*; quoted in Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 313.

[150] Floros, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies*, 317.

[151] Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music*, 121.

Mahler’s symphonies also present a continuous line of thought. The first four symphonies progress from the “out-there” hero (the Titan) to the resurrection (for everyone) to Nature and man’s place in it and back to heaven. The middle three, Five, Six and Seven, deal with triumph, tragedy and ignorant affirmation. The Eighth returns to the transcendent. The final trilogy of *Das Lied*, Ninth and Tenth represent Mahler’s intensely personal look at his own life. The line goes from the transcendent to the personal in a way that shows Mahler’s growth of understanding. He began to understand that the transcendent must lead to the personal and in fact *is* personal. By studying these symphonies, we cannot gain a deeper knowledge of the world as it is, but only as Mahler saw it. Perhaps that is deeper knowledge than we realize.

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