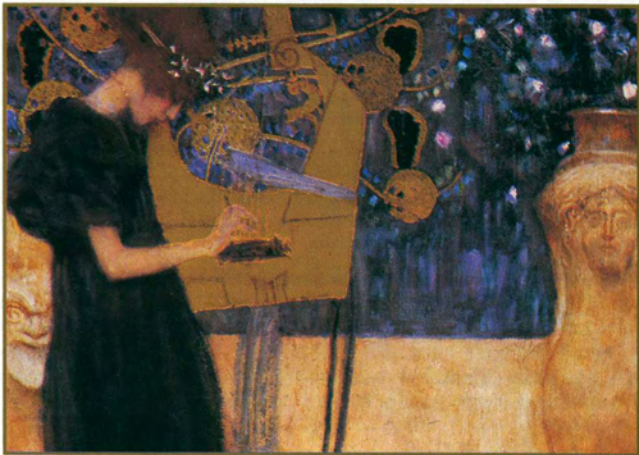


MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 "Titan"

Slovak Philharmonic
Zdenek Kosler



1988 Recording | Playing Time : 52'57"

Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Symphony No. 1 in D Major, "The Titan"

Langsam, schleppend
Kraeftig bewegt
Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen
Stuermisch bewegt

The great Viennese symphonic tradition found worthy successors in two composers of very different temperament and background, Anton Bruckner and Gustav Mahler. The latter, indeed, extended the form in an extraordinary way that has had a far-reaching effect on the course of Western music.

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

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

Although his career as a conductor involved him most closely with opera, Mahler attempted little composition in this field. His work as a composer consists chiefly of his songs and of his ten symphonies, the last left unfinished at his death, and his monumental setting of poems from the Chinese in *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Mahler's Symphony No. 1 in D Major was completed, in its first version, in 1888, incredibly enough five years before Dvořák's *Symphony From the New World* and only five years after the last symphony of Brahms. It was first performed the following year in Budapest, where Mahler had been appointed director of the Hungarian opera, before an audience that became increasingly restive as the work proceeded.

For the symphony Mahler had drawn up a programme, although he strongly believed that, whatever literary programme might lie behind a composition, the music should be able to stand on its own, without verbal explanation. No narrative element was given to the first audience in Budapest, but later performances were at first helped by a sketched description of the work:

Part I From the days of youth - Flower, Fruit and Thorn-pieces (Blumen, Früchte und Dornenstücke)

1. Spring and no end to it.

The introduction describes the awakening of nature and earliest dawn.

2. Blumenkapitel (Andante)

3. In full sail (Scherzo)

Part II Commedia umana

4. Shipwrecked. A dead march in the manner of Callot. The following explanation may be given, if required: The composer found the external inspiration for this piece in a satirical picture well known to all children in South Germany, *The Huntsman's Funeral*, from an old book of children's stories. The animals of the forest escort the body of the dead forester to the grave. Hares carry a little flag, with a band of Bohemian village musicians in front, accompanied by cats, toads,

crows, and so on, playing, and by stags, does, foxes and other four-footed and feathered denizens of the forest, in comic guise. Here the music is intended to express ironic jesting alternating with mysterious brooding. This is followed immediately by:

5. Dall'inferno al Paradiso (Allegro furioso), the sudden expression of the feelings of a deeply wounded heart.

The symphony, originally a symphonic poem, although without title, has a more explicit literary source in the work of Jean Paul, an early Romantic writer whose Flegeljahre had had a strong influence on the young Schumann. The programmatic titles of the first two movements are taken from Jean Paul, whose connection with the seventeenth century French artist Jacques Callot is seen in his preface to E.T.A. Hoffmann's Phantasiestuecke in Callots Manier. In short the symphony, in common with Mahler's early songs, has its literary inspiration in writing of the earliest romantics, in the curiously grotesque ironical world of Jean Paul and in the evocative Des Knaben Wunderhorn of Brentano and von Arnim. The later title of the work, Titan, refers not to the struggle between the ancient gods of Greece so much as to the novel of that name by Jean Paul, in which two "titans" or Himmelsstuermer, struggle for their aims of intellectual freedom or pleasure.

The first movement opens with a slow section in which fanfares pierce the summer morning mists, suggesting pictorially the ideas of Mahler's earlier song Ging heut' Morgen ueber's Feld, the melody of which provides the first subject. The slower music returns, but nothing is done to dispel the mood of happy serenity, although, as the movement hurries forward again, we may be aware of more tragic implications, Dornenstuecke. A scherzo follows, with a Schubertian trio, completing the first section.

After a pause the second part of the symphony opens with a solemn funeral march, making satirical use of a minor version of the children's song Frère Jacques, and easily intelligible in terms of the composer's explanation. Use is also made of Mahler's song Die zwei blaue Augen in music of bitter contrast and heartfelt anguish.

The last movement, to which the Italian explanatory title was later added, is one of great dramatic intensity. Audiences unfamiliar with the work might well be warned by the example of the first performance in Budapest, when a woman jumped out of her seat in alarm as the movement began, an incident that caused the composer some amusement. A march leads to a more lyrical melody, before a renewed storm of sound, in music that is, as Mahler was to claim, a world in itself.

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, established as a professional orchestra in Bratislava (formerly Pressburg) in 1949, has won itself a considerable reputation during its relatively short existence.

Slovakia, which, with Bohemia and Moravia, became the Republic of Czechoslovakia in 1918, was the source of a great deal of music during the years of the Habsburg Empire. This musically fertile region has been influenced by Viennese, Hungarian and Bohemian music and it is these influences that have given the Slovak Philharmonic, one of Europe's finest orchestras, its unique character. On its many international tours, and at festivals throughout Europe, the orchestra has been praised for its great musicality and has been compared by enthusiastic critics with such world-class orchestras as the Vienna Philharmonic.

The Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra has benefited considerably from the work of its distinguished conductors. These included Vaclav Talich (1949 - 1952), Ludovit Rajter and Ladislav Slovak. The Czech conductor Libor Pešek was appointed resident conductor in 1981, and the present Principal Conductor is the Slovak musician Bystrik Rezucha. Zdenek Košler has also had a long and distinguished association with the orchestra and has conducted many of its most successful recordings, among them the complete symphonies of Dvorák.

During the years of its professional existence the Slovak Philharmonic has worked under the direction of many of the most distinguished conductors from abroad, from Eugene Goossens and Malcolm Sargent to Claudio Abbado, Antal Dorati and Riccardo Muti.

The orchestra has undertaken many tours abroad, including visits to Germany and Japan, and has made a large number of recordings for the Czech Opus label, for Supraphon, for Hungaroton and, in recent years, for the Marco Polo and Naxos labels. These recordings have brought the orchestra a growing international reputation and praise from the critics of leading international publications.

Zdeněk Košler

The Czech conductor Zdeněk Košler studied under Karel Ančerl at the Prague Academy of Arts, and distinguished himself early in his career at the Besançon Conductors' Competition and in the Dimitri Mitropoulos Competition in New York. The first prize in the second of these enabled him to work as assistant conductor with Leonard Bernstein for one year.

In Czechoslovakia Košler began as conductor of the Prague opera ensemble, before becoming chief conductor and music director of the opera in Olomouc and Ostrava. He spent a short time as permanent conductor of the Prague Symphony Orchestra, before moving to Berlin, where he was appointed Music Director of the Komische Oper in 1965. In 1971 he became chief conductor of the Slovak National Theatre Opera, undertaking engagements at the same time with the Slovak Philharmonic Orchestra, and conducting the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra in Prague, in addition to guest appearances with major orchestras abroad, in Europe, Canada and the Far East.

As permanent conductor of the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra Zdeněk Košler has travelled widely. From 1980 until 1985 he was chief conductor and artistic director of the Prague National Theatre Opera, and has received the highest national honour, the title National Artist from the Czechoslovakian government, while winning awards abroad for his recordings.

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NAXOS



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DDD

 Playing
 Time :
 52'57"

MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 'Titan'

Slovak Philharmonic
 Zdeněk Košler, Conductor

Symphony No. 1 in D Major 'Titan'

- | | | |
|---|---|---------|
| 1 | Langsam, schleppend | (15:59) |
| 2 | Scherzo. Kraeftig bewegt | (8:16) |
| 3 | Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen | (10:11) |
| 4 | Stuermisch bewegt | (18:31) |

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the
 Slovak Philharmonic in Bratislava from
 19th to 22nd March, 1988.

Producer: Martin Sauer
 Music Notes: Keith Anderson

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