

MAHLER

Symphony No. 4 in G Major

Lynda Russell, Soprano
Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antoni Wit



Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Symphony No. 4 in G Major

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, among other things creating a symphonic form that included in it the tradition of song in a varied tapestry of sound particularly apt for a twentieth century that has found in Mahler's work a reflection of its own joys and sorrows.

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 Kaliste in Bohemia in 1860. 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, to 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 Court Opera, two months after his baptism as a Catholic, a necessary preliminary. In Vienna he effected 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*. The greater part of his music was written during summer holidays away from the business of the opera-house.

Mahler started work on his fourth symphony in the summer of 1899, two years after his appointment to the Court Opera. He had completed his third symphony in 1896 and now, as his stay at the Villa Kerry at Alt Aussee in the Salzkammergut drew to a close, he hurried to write down musical ideas for a new symphony as they occurred to him, having occupied himself in July and early August with the correction of proofs of the Third Symphony and of the *Klagende Lied*. The following summer he was able to find at least something of the necessary peace and seclusion at his newly acquired property of Maiernigg on the Wörthersee to complete the short score of the new symphony, which was orchestrated during the winter in Vienna and first performed in Munich on 25th November 1901. The symphony, which takes as its final movement a song setting written and orchestrated in 1892, is the last of the three using texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn), the seminal collection of folk-songs made by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano and published in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the spirit of which imbues the whole symphony. The song, referred to by Mahler as *Das himmlische Leben*, that forms the finale of the Fourth Symphony had earlier been intended as a seventh and final movement for the Third Symphony, following the suggested programme to that work as "What the child tells me" but instead proved the source of a new work. The Fourth Symphony has throughout the suggestion of beauty and innocence that the poem itself and its musical setting embody, reflecting not only the world of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* but also the beauty of the countryside in which the symphony was written, the imagined terrors of the second movement dispelled by what follows.

The Fourth Symphony is scored for an orchestra of four flutes, two doubling with piccolo, three oboes, one doubling on cor anglais, three clarinets in B flat, A and C, doubling with two E flat clarinets and a bass clarinet, three bassoons, the third doubling on contra-bassoon, four French horns, three trumpets, timpani, bass drum, triangle, sleigh-bells, glockenspiel, cymbals and tam-tam, harp and strings. This provides the opportunity for a rich variety of orchestral colour. There is an element of mock-classicism in the first movement of the symphony, in its thematic material, its textures and in its use of classical first movement form, the whole, however, essentially Mahlerian in its apparent ingenuousness, its use of orchestral colour and in the contrasts of mood introduced in the central development. The movement ends with a quasi-improvisatory passage for French horn, an apparent reminiscence of Mozart, after which the violins gently lead into a conclusion of increasing excitement.

The second movement, generally described as a Totentanz (Dance of Death), is in the form of a Scherzo with two Trios. It makes use of a solo violin tuned up a tone, in the rôle of a ghostly fiddler, the repeated Scherzo contrasted with the Ländler type Trios, introduced by horn and trumpet respectively. The third movement is started by the lower strings, suggesting at first the language of Brahms, but going on to a miraculous varying of the theme, in major and minor version, combining with it the wider structure of sonata-rondo form. The oboe leads into a minor version of the thematic material. The major key is restored for a further set of variations, followed by a return of the material in the minor key. This is succeeded by a set of variations on the major key theme, now in the form of a series of dances, an Austrian Ländler, a Minuet and a wilder dance, and a return to material from the first part of the movement. The concluding section, with its string arpeggios and harp glissandos leads to a gentle and tender final passage.

The song that ends the symphony and from which the mood of the whole work is derived is in strophic form, a series of five verses, some separated by brief orchestral intervention. The score carries a worried injunction to the conductor to provide an exceptionally discreet orchestral accompaniment to the song, a

detail not exceptional from a composer who was at the same time one of the greatest conductors of his time and who took particular care to ensure, as far as he could, that his own music should be performed exactly as he wanted. The initial instruction *Sehr behaglich* (very comfortably) expresses the general mood of music that reflects the simple ingenuousness of the text, without ever faltering into triviality. *Das himmlische Leben* is a beautiful conclusion to a symphony of singular beauty.

IV Sehr behaglich

Wir genießen die himmlischen Freuden,
drum tun wir das Irdische meiden.
Kein weltlich' Getümmel
hört man nicht im Himmel!
Lebt alles in sanftester Ruh'!
Wir führen ein englisches Leben!
Sind dennoch ganz lustig daneben!
Wir tanzen und springen,
wir hüpfen und singen!
Sanct Peter im Himmel sieht zu!

Johannes das Lämmlein auslasset,
der Metzger Herodes drauf passet!
Wir führen ein geduldig's unschuldig's,
ein liebliches Lämmlein zu Tod!
Sanct Lucas den Ochsen tät schlachten,
ohn' einig's Bedenken und Achten,
der Wein kost kein Heller
im himmlischen Keller,
die Englein, die backen das Brot.

IV Sehr behaglich

We take delight in the joys of Heaven
and so shun those of earth.
No worldly tumult
does one hear in Heaven!
Everything lives in gentlest peace,
we lead the life of angels,
and yet we are quite cheerful
we dance and leap,
we skip and sing.
St. Peter in Heaven sees us!

St. John gives up his little lamb,
the butcher Herod seizes it!
We lead an innocent, patient,
beloved little lamb to death!
St. Luke kills the oxen
without thinking or caring.
Wine costs not a penny
in Heaven's cellar.
The little angels bake the bread.

Gut' Kräuter von allerhand Arten,
die wachsen im himmlischen Garten!

Gut' Spargel, Fisolen
und was wir nur wollen!
Ganze Schüsseln voll sind uns bereit!
Gut ' Äpfel, gut' Birn' und gut Trauben!
Die Gärtner, die Alles erlauben!
Willst Rehbock, willst Hasen
auf offener Strassen
sie laufen herbei!

Sollt ein Festtag etwa kommen
alle Fische gleich
mit Freuden angeschwommen!
Dort läuft schon Sanct Peter
mit Netz und mit Köder
zum himmlischen Weiher hinein.
Sanct Martha die Köchin muss sein!

Kein Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden,
die uns'rer verglichen kann werden.
Elftausend Jungfrauen
zu tanzen sich trauen!
Sanct Ursula selbst dazu lacht!
Cäcilia mit ihren Verwandten
sind treffliche Hofmusikanten!
Die englischen Stimmen
ermuntern die Sinnen,
dass Alles für Freuden erwacht.

(aus Des Knaben Wunderhorn)

Good herbs of all kinds
grow in Heaven's garden!

Good asparagus, beans
and everything we want!
Whole dishes full are prepared for us!
Good apples, good pears and good grapes,
the gardeners offer everything!
If you want a roebuck or rabbit,
in the streets
they are running about!

Should a feast-day come,
all the fish
swim happily by!
There goes St. Peter
with his net and bait
to the heavenly fish-pond.
St. Martha must be the cook!

There is no music on earth
that can be compared with ours.
Eleven thousand girls
give themselves over to dancing.
St. Ursula herself smiles!
Cecilia with her relations
are excellent court musicians!
The angels' voices
cheer our senses
and joy wakens in us all!

(from Des Knaben Wunderhorn)

Lynda Russell

The English soprano Lynda Russell was born in Birmingham and studied at the Royal College of Music in London, in Paris and in Vienna. Her many prizes and awards include the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship. She has sung in many of the leading opera-houses of the world. At home she has appeared at Glyndebourne, with Opera North, Opera Northern Ireland and the English National Opera, with the last of these at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She has appeared widely in oratorio and in concert performances, including a BBC television recording of Handel's Messiah with Harry Christophers and The Sixteen and a televised performance of the German Requiem of Brahms for BBC Wales. Other engagements have taken her to the major cities of Europe as a concert and recital singer.

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO)

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO) was founded in 1945, soon after the end of the World War II, by the eminent Polish conductor Witold Rowicki. The PNRSO replaced the Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra which had existed from 1934 to 1939 in Warsaw, under the direction of another outstanding artist, Grzegorz Fitelberg. In 1947 Grzegorz Fitelberg returned to Poland and became artistic director of the PNRSO. He was followed by a series of distinguished Polish conductors - Jan Krenz, Bohdan Wodiezko, Kazimierz Kord, Tadeusz Strugala, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Stanislaw Wislocki and, since 1983, Antoni Wit. The orchestra has appeared with conductors and soloists of the greatest distinction and has recorded for Polskie Nagrania and many international record labels. For Naxos, the PNRSO will record the complete symphonies of Tchaikovsky and Mahler.

Antoni Wit

Antoni Wit was born in Cracow in 1944 and studied there, before becoming assistant to Witold Rowicki with the National Philharmonic Orchestra in Warsaw in 1967. He studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris and with Penderecki and in 1971 was a prize-winner in the Herbert von Karajan Competition. Study at Tanglewood with Skrowaczewski and Seiji Ozawa was followed by appointment as Principal Conductor first of the Pomeranian Philharmonic and then of the Cracow Radio Symphony Orchestra. In 1983 he took up the position of Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra in Katowice. Antoni Wit has undertaken many engagements abroad with major orchestras, ranging from the Berlin Philharmonic and the BBC Welsh and Scottish Symphony Orchestras to the Kusatsu Festival Orchestra in Japan.

G. Mahler

Symphonie Nr. 4 G-dur

1899 entwarf Gustav Mahler seine vierte Symphonie im österreichischen Aussee. Ursprünglich sah der Entwurf sechs Sätze vor, die folgende Überschriften erhalten sollten:

Nr. 1 Die Welt als ewige Jetztzeit *f* Nr. 2 Das irdische Leben *f* Nr. 3 Caritas (Adagio) *f* Nr. 4 Morgenglocken *f* Nr. 5 Die Welt ohne Schwere (Scherzo) *f* Nr. 6 Das himmlische Leben.

In der endgültigen Fassung, die 1900 abgeschlossen wurde, ist dieser Plan auf die Sätze 1 bis 3 und 6 reduziert. Die "Morgenglocken" übernimmt Mahler in seine dritte Symphonie, das Scherzo "Die Welt ohne Schwere" in die Fünfte.

Trotz der Verkürzung ist der Inhalt des Werkes prinzipiell erhalten geblieben. Man könnte sogar sagen, daß die Auslassung der Morgenglocken und des Scherzo nach dem Adagio und vor dem Sopransolo des "Himmlischen Lebens" dem gesamten Programm eine größere dramaturgische Konsequenz verliehen hat.

Der erste Satz, "Die Welt als ewige Jetztzeit", bedient sich einer Sprache, die auf die Musik der Klassik zurückblickt und formal absolut schulmäßig gehalten ist; im "irdischen Leben" spielt Freund Hein, der Tod persönlich, sein verstimmtes Geigensolo; im dritten Satz dann reißt nach einer langen, unaufhaltsamen Steigerung das Tor zum Jenseits mit einem riesigen Fortissimo auf; und von hier aus führt der Weg direkt ins "Himmlische Leben" - eine logische Handlungskette.

Seiner Freundin aus der Konservatoriumszeit, Nathalie Bauer-Lechner, hat Gustav Mahler den außermusikalischen Inhalt erläutert. Dabei bezeichnete er das "himmlische Leben" als "die sich ganz verjüngende Spitze von dem Bau dieser Vierten Symphonie. Was mir hier vorschwebte, war ungemein schwer zu machen. Stell dir das unterschiedene Himmelsblau vor, das schwieriger zu treffen ist als alle wechselnden und kontrastierenden Tinten. Dies ist die Grundstimmung des Ganzen. Nur manchmal verfinstert es sich und wird spukhaft schauerlich:

doch nicht der Himmel selbst ist es, der sich trübt, er leuchtet fort in ewigem Blau ... Nur uns wird er plötzlich grauenhaft, wie einen am schönsten Tage im lichtübergossenen Wald oft ein panischer Schreck überfällt."

Und so beginnt die Symphonie gewissermaßen "himmelsblau": mit einer geradezu herzlichen Naivität im klassisch-klassizistischen Glöckchengebimmel und einer charmanten und graziösen Melodie, die sogleich in die Gefilde einer liebenswerten, konfliktfreien Jenseitigkeit weisen. Was immer sich an Eintrübungen hören läßt, bleibt Episode. Selbst der geigende Tod, ein quasi mittelalterliches Bild aus grausiger Zeit - selbst der Knochenmann hat seine Fiedel zwar verstimmt, doch er fügt sich dem vorgeschriebenen Ländler ohne allzu große Widerborstigkeiten.

Die verklärte Schönheit des Adagio - in dem das im Lied von der Erde und der neunten Symphonie wieder aufgegriffene Ewigkeitsmotiv eine prominente Rolle spielt - und sein unmittelbarer Brückenschlag ins Finale sind dann die völlige Loslösung von jeder Erdschwere und zugleich ein Abschied von den Wunderhorn-Themen der ersten vier Symphonien. Ein Abschied in kindlicher Verklärung. Als nächstes folgt der dreiteilige tragische Riesenroman der Symphonien Nr. 5 bis Nr. 7 ...

Gustav Mahler

Symphonie N°4 En sol majeur

La composition de la 4^{ème} *Symphonie* appartient à la période viennoise (1897-1907) de la carrière de Gustav Mahler. L'oeuvre fut entamée en juillet 1899, pendant le séjour du musicien à Aussee.

Après deux années d'intense activité à la tête de l'Opéra de Vienne, Mahler trouvait enfin un peu de calme pour se remettre à la composition. En avril 1897 il avait en effet été nommé chef à l'Opéra, où il partageait la direction de l'orchestre avec Richter, Fuchs et Jahn, également directeur de l'établissement.

Mahler lui succéda d'ailleurs à ce poste le 8 octobre. L'ascension du nouveau chef fut extrêmement rapide dans cette institution lyrique prestigieuse, mais victime de traditions sclérosantes. Mahler sut conquérir la critique dans sa grande majorité par sa direction énergique, son sens théâtral, la grande minutie avec laquelle il organisait les représentations. C'en était fini des intolérables coupures jusqu'alors infligées au *Tristan et Isolde* ou aux *Meistersinger* de Richard Wagner, que Mahler inscrivit très fréquemment dans les programmes de l'Opéra, aux côtés de Mozart, mais aussi de compositeurs plus récents, tel Tchaïkovsky, dont les oeuvres lyriques demeuraient méconnues.

Mahler occupait déjà une place centrale dans la vie musicale viennoise quand on vint lui proposer, en septembre 1898, de prendre la succession du vieux Hans Richter à la tête de la Philharmonie de Vienne. Mahler accepta. La tâche allait se révéler plus ardue qu'à l'Opéra. Premier chef à diriger de mémoire, d'un grand modernisme dans l'approche des partitions, il recueillit des jugements souvent élogieux parmi le public et la critique. Mais de nombreuses résistances alimentées par des tendances antisémites apparurent au sein d'une formation dont Mahler devait abandonner la direction en 1901.

La charge de travail, ces nombreuses tracasseries ne furent pas sans effet sur la santé et le moral du compositeur qui ne trouvait de détente et de repos que pendant la période estivale. Durant l'été 1899, à Aussee, il était partagé entre la satisfaction devant l'abondance des idées musicales pour sa nouvelle symphonie

et l'angoisse de devoir bientôt retrouver les soucis de l'existence viennoise. Mahler dut d'ailleurs attendre son séjour à Maiernigg l'été suivant pour achever l'oeuvre, le 6 août.

Après les vastes *Symphonies n° 2 + Résurrection* (achevée en 1894) et n° 3 (ach. en 1896), la *Symphonie n° 4* retrouve des proportions plus humaines. Elle fait appel à une soprano et un orchestre et se divise en quatre mouvements.

L'oeuvre s'ouvre sur un Allegro que Mahler note: *Circonspect, sans presser*. On y remarque l'extrême concision de l'écriture et l'inventivité surprenante avec laquelle le compositeur exploite la substance thématique.

Le deuxième mouvement (*Modéré, sans hâte*), le plus bref de la symphonie, se singularise par l'utilisation d'un violon désaccordé, aux accents ironiques.

Le troisième mouvement (*Tranquille*) repose sur un complexe système de variations construites à partir de deux thèmes. Peu avant son terme, dans le passage marqué *Poco piu mosso*, le thème principal du *Finale* apparaît aux cuivres. La soprano intervient dans le dernier mouvement. Il s'agit d'un lied écrit sur un poème extrait du *Knaben Wunderhorn* et qui doit, selon Mahler, être interprété « sur un ton joyeux, enfantin, sans la moindre parodie ».

La 4ème *Symphonie* connut des débuts difficiles. Elle fut créée à Munich, le 25 novembre 1901, sous la direction du compositeur, avec Rita Michalek dans la partie de soprano. Le public se montra d'une extrême froideur. Cette incompréhension affecta d'autant plus l'auteur qu'il accordait une place très grande à cette oeuvre.

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MAHLER: Symphony No. 4

NAXOS

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STEREO

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MAHLER

Symphony No. 4 in G Major

Lynda Russell, Soprano

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra

Antoni Wit

DDD

 Playing
Time :
56'54"

Symphony No. 4 in G Major

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | Bedächtig, nicht eilen | (16:36) |
| 2 | In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast | (9:36) |
| 3 | Ruhevoll, poco adagio | (21:04) |
| 4 | Sehr behaglich | (9:26) |

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NAXOS

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