



DDD

8.550529-30

MAHLER

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor “Tragic”

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Antoni Wit, Conductor



2 CD's

Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Symphony No. 6 "Tragic" in A Minor

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, then in Prague, Budapest and Hamburg, before moving to a 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 a week after his return to Vienna, 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, together with 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, a miraculous achievement in view of his other obligations.

The new century brought a marked change in Mahler's life. In 1902, to the amazement of all Vienna, he married the twenty-year-old Alma Schindler, daughter of the painter Anton Schindler and a composition pupil of Zemlinsky, future wife of the architect Walter Gropius and later of the writer Franz Werfel. Summer holidays were spent at a villa Mahler had had built at Maiernigg on the Wörthersee. Here he was able to work in a garden chalet with relative lack of disturbance. In the summer of 1903 he worked on his Sixth Symphony, writing three of the four movements in that year and completing the whole work in the summer of 1904, at a period when the birth of the second of his two daughters brought some happiness amid the inevitable frustrations and difficulties of Vienna and the relatively minor but irritating disturbances of his peace at Maiernigg from holiday-makers. Alma Mahler later wrote of the symphony, which her husband had played through to her as the summer drew to a close. The second subject of the first movement, he told her, represented Alma herself, while the third movement (now the second) represented the rhythmic games of the two children, walking with uneven steps on the sands of the lake-shore - an unlikely event, in view of the fact that the second child was born only in June 1904. The fading of the childish voices at the end of the movement seemed, like the *Kindertotenlieder* completed in the same summer, to have, with hindsight, an ominous nature, since the elder of Mahler's daughters died suddenly in 1907. The last movement, according to Alma Mahler, described the composer himself, his downfall or that of his hero, with three blows of Fate, the last of which, later omitted, was fatal. Again with hindsight, these three blows she saw as the death of their daughter, the diagnosis of Mahler's heart ailment and his resignation from the Court Opera, events of 1907.

The Sixth Symphony was first performed in 1906 in Essen at a generally undistinguished festival of contemporary music given by the Allgemeiner deutsche Musikverein. The programme opened with a performance of Mozart's Masonic Funeral Music, conducted by Richard Strauss, followed by the new symphony under the composer's own direction. It was well received in the concert-hall but had a very mixed wider critical reception, puzzling many, as Mahler had said it would. The symphony, conceived on a vast scale, is scored for piccolo and four flutes, two also doubling on piccolo, four oboes, two players doubling on cor anglais, cor anglais, clarinet in D and in E flat, three clarinets in A and in B flat, bass clarinet, four bassoons, double bassoon, eight French horns, six trumpets, three trombones and bass trombone, bass tuba, two pairs of timpani, a percussion section of glockenspiel, cow-bells, deep tubular bells, whip, hammer, xylophone, cymbals, triangle, side-drum, bass drum, tam-tam, two harps, celesta and strings.

Some have chosen to use the distinguishing title *Tragic* for Mahler's Sixth Symphony. This echoes the composer's own description of the work and the mood of pessimism that prevails in the last movement of the symphony, with the ominous hammer-blows of Fate, prefiguring, as Alma Mahler suggested, the tragedy of Mahler's final years.

The first movement is marked *Allegro energico, ma non troppo*, with the added direction *Heftig, aber markig*. There is a brief introduction of five bars of march rhythm before the appearance of the first of the three principal subjects, the second prefaced by a loud trumpet chord, but introduced gently enough by the flutes and woodwind. Shortly after this Alma Mahler's theme, the true second subject, is heard, marked *schwungvoll*. The exposition is repeated, followed by a central development section, with Alma Mahler's theme and the cow-bells suggesting the simple joy of the countryside. The recapitulation starts with the first subject now in A major, almost at once returning to the minor. Alma Mahler's theme leads to a coda that starts with the insistent rhythm of repeated notes on double bassoon and double basses, but is eventually dominated by this theme.

The Scherzo, marked *Wuchtig* (Heavy), in 3/8, starts as some kind of tragic march, its rhythm stressed by the drum. The mood changes with the Trio, marked *Altväterisch*, in olden style, introduced by the oboe, a satirical view of an elegant past, in music that now turns again into the threatening and eerie. To this the muted strings offer a gentle contrast in the opening of the lyrical *Andante moderato*, characteristically marked *zart und ausdrucksvoll* (tender and expressive). The second theme is introduced by the *cor anglais* and the mood is continued in music that grows in intensity of feeling and yearning, redolent of the countryside in which the symphony was written.

The last movement, the longest of the four, is one of strong and violent contrasts. Structurally it is of some complexity, opening with a *Sostenuto* introduction. This consists of five elements, the first introduced by harp and celesta and characterised by the first violin theme. A sudden burst of sound leads to a fragmentary theme for bass tuba, followed by a third element, a woodwind and brass chorale. A heavy drum-beat opens the fourth section of the introduction, while the insistent rhythm of the *Allegro moderato* provides the fifth element. There follows a series of three thematic groups, the first, marked *Allegro energico*. There is a repetition of material derived from the introduction and a part of the following *Allegro*, before the first hammer-blow signals a development, followed by a second hammer-blow and a further development of the material. Earlier elements again return, to be followed by a recapitulation proper, marked *Molto pesante*. A third hammer-blow, or in a revised version the sound of the tam-tam, starts the coda. It will be seen that this movement, which defies brief analysis or explanation, has about it the elements of a rondo, although of a very complex and novel kind. At the same time its reminiscences of what has passed serve to draw together the whole massive work into a remarkable unity, in spite of its bewildering variety of material and mood.

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO)

The Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra of Katowice (PNRSO) was founded in 1935 in Warsaw through the initiative of well-known Polish conductor and composer Grzegorz Fitelberg. Under his direction the ensemble worked till the outbreak of the World War II. Soon after the war, in March 1945, the orchestra was resurrected in Katowice by the eminent Polish conductor Witold Rowicki. 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.

Gustav Mahler

Symphonie Nr. 6 a-moll

“Meine VI. wird Rätsel aufgeben, an die sich nur eine Generation heranwagen darf, die meine ersten fünf in sich aufgenommen und verdaut hat,” schreibt Gustav Mahler im Herbst 1904 seinem frühen Biographen Richard Specht. Und er sollte Recht behalten. Bis heute ist die sechste Symphonie, die - mit den typischen, arbeitsbedingten Unterbrechungen - zwischen 1903 und 1905 entstand, in mancher Hinsicht ein Rätsel geblieben, obwohl Mahlers Schaffen längst “aufgenommen und verdaut” wurde. Ihre erbarmungslos düstere, oft genug gespenstische Sprache, die ihr den Namen “die Tragische” eingetragen hat, paßt so gar nicht zu den äußeren Lebensumständen: Am 15. Juni 1904 hatte Alma Mahler die zweite Tochter zur Welt gebracht; der Wiener Hofoperndirektor Mahler war eben dabei, eine neue Inszenierung des “Fidelio” von Ludwig van Beethoven vorzubereiten; gesellschaftlich und finanziell war das Leben gesichert - und das Verhältnis zwischen den Eheleuten war noch nicht von jenen Mißhelligkeiten getrübt, die den Komponisten später sogar auf die Couch des Psychoanalytikers Sigmund Freud brachten.

Was also bringt einen Komponisten dazu, in dieser Zeit günstiger Zeichen und höchster Schaffenskraft ein Werk von derartiger Tragik zu verfassen - eine Musik, in der fürchterliche Bedrohung und beklemmende Einsamkeit, brutale Schicksalsschläge und Resignation den Ton angeben? Immer wieder hat man versucht, diese Fragen im Laufe der beinahe 90 Jahre zu lösen, die diese Symphonie jetzt von sich reden macht. Waren es, wie der Musikforscher Hans Ferdinand Redlich meinte, “die Schrecken dieses von zwei Weltkriegen zerplüßten Jahrhunderts”, die Mahler vorausgesehen hat? Oder sogar der erbarmungslose Marschtritt der braun und schwarz uniformierten Mordkolonnen, deren sturer Takt rund drei Jahrzehnte später den allgemeinen Untergang begleitet?

Alle Spekulationen dieser Art sind müßig. Zu viele Elemente sind hier miteinander verbunden, als daß man einen einzigen Aspekt herausdestillieren und zum Schlüssel des Verständnisses wählen könnte. Zu viele Zitate und Anspielungen weisen hin auf die Werke älterer Komponisten: bis zurück zu Beethovens Klaviersonate Nr. 17 d-moll und Robert Schumanns "Manfred"- Ouvertüre. Und das ungewöhnliche, riesenhaft besetzte Orchester mit seinem ausgefallenen Instrumentarium tut ein übriges zum verwirrenden Beziehungsreichtum. Die Herdenglocken als Symbole der Einsamkeit, die beiden Hammerschläge ("wie ein Axthieb") im Finale, sie allein bieten Stoff genug, nach konkreten Bedeutungen zu suchen. Der stolpernde, polternde Rhythmus des zweiten Satzes, schildert er wirklich "das arhythmische Spielen der beiden kleinen Kinder, die torkelnd durch den Sand laufen," wie Alma Mahler behauptet? Was für ein Spiel wäre das, wo am Schluß nur noch klägliches Wimmern bleibt?

Seinem Kollegen Jean Sibelius gegenüber hat Gustav Mahler einmal geäußert, eine Symphonie müsse eine Welt sein. Und in einer solchen Welt wird das Private immer nur ein Teilaspekt des Ganzen sein, eine Region von vielen. Wie auch eine "Welt", die nur tragisch wäre, ihren Namen nicht verdiente. Freude, Überschwang, Trauer und Verzweiflung, Kampf und Verzicht - all diese Elemente gehören unverzichtbar dazu, soll tatsächlich ein Universum geschaffen werden. Und so wird man der rätselhaften sechsten Symphonie wohl am ehesten gerecht, wenn man sie im Zusammenhang mit ihren beiden Geschwistern zur linken und rechten hört - der Fünften (s. Naxos 8.550528) und der Siebten. Gemeinsam bilden sie die drei großen Kapitel eines Romans oder auch die drei Romane einer Trilogie, die auf mannigfache Weise miteinander verflochten sind. Die Tragik der Sechsten kündigt sich im Trauermarsch der Fünften an, während ihr Finale bereits den grenzenlosen Jubel vom Ende der Siebten andeutet. Und wenn die sechste Symphonie nach einem gräßlichen letzten Aufschrei kaum hörbar verklungen ist, beginnt zu Beginn der Siebten - wiederum äußerst leise - ein neuer Pulsschlag, ein neues Leben.

So erscheint die "tragische" Symphonie mit ihrer beinahe klassischen, wenngleich ins Gigantische gesteigerten Viersätzigkeit als finsterer Mittelpunkt eines dreiaktigen Schauspiels. Doch selbst hier, in aller Wut, Ausweglosigkeit und Niedergeschlagenheit, öffnet sich ein Fenster zur Idylle. Nach dem wuchtigen Marsch und dem erschreckenden Scherzo ist der langsame Satz beinahe schon eine Insel des Friedens, des Trostes, ehe dann das halbstündige Finale wie eine Tragödie in der Tragödie alle Hoffnungen zerschlägt.

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Gustav Mahler

Symphonie n°6 en la mineur, "Tragique"

La composition de la *6ème Symphonie* appartient à la période viennoise (1897-1907) de la carrière de Gustav Mahler. C'est pendant son séjour estival à Maiernigg, en 1903, que le musicien trouva le temps nécessaire pour y travailler. Depuis 1897 en effet, Mahler était totalement impliqué dans la vie musicale de la capitale autrichienne. On rappellera qu'en avril 1897 il y avait 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 le remplaça d'ailleurs à ce poste en octobre.

L'ascension du nouveau chef dans cette institution lyrique prestigieuse, mais victime de traditions sclérosantes, fut donc rapide. Il sut conquérir la critique dans sa grande majorité par sa direction énergique, son sens théâtral et 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 Tchaïkovski, 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. Il 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 abandonna la direction en 1901.

C'est seulement durant les mois d'été que l'artiste trouvait le temps et le calme nécessaires pour se consacrer à la composition. Après la 4^{ème} (1899-1900), la 5^{ème} (1901-1902), Mahler débuta la composition de sa 6^{ème} *Symphonie* en juin 1903. Selon toute vraisemblance, il termina cette année là les trois premiers mouvements et esquissa l'immense *finale*. Il fut achevé en septembre 1904, juste après les *Kindertotenlieder* entamés en 1901.

La création de la *Symphonie en la mineur* eut lieu en 1905 à Essen, sous la direction de l'auteur. Le qualificatif "*Tragique*" définit on ne peut mieux son climat noir et tendu.

En quatre mouvements, elle débute par un *Allegro energico ma non troppo* dont le rythme de marche s'impose dès les premières mesures d'un mouvement caractérisé par une répétition littérale de l'exposition où l'on distingue trois thèmes. C'est dans le la majeur triomphal de la *coda* que s'achève cette première partie.

Suit un *Scherzo* en la mineur dans lequel s'insère un *trio* en fa majeur. Par de fréquents changements de mesure, Mahler y crée de ces effets grotesques et ironiques qu'il affectionne. L'*Andante moderato* en mi bémol majeur, entièrement tourné vers son *climax* final, s'apparente à une lente ascension. La présence de la nature y est très marquée.

Changement total de climat dans la *Finale-Allegro moderato*. Dès l'introduction, en ut mineur, la dimension tragique de la 6^{ème} réapparaît. De très vastes dimensions (822 mesures!), ce dernier mouvement plonge l'auditeur dans un univers sombre et menaçant où les paroles de Gustav Mahler prennent tout leur sens: "C'est la somme de toutes les souffrances que j'ai été obligé d'endurer"...

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8.550529-30

STEREO

MAHLER

DDD

Playing
Time:
84'04"

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor "Tragic"

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
(Katowice)
Antoni Wit, Conductor

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor "Tragic"

CD 1:

- | | | |
|---|--|---------|
| 1 | I. Allegro energico, ma non troppo.
Heftig, aber markig | (23:43) |
| 2 | II. Scherzo: Wuchtig | (12:53) |

CD 2:

- | | | |
|---|---|---------|
| 1 | III. Andante moderato | (16:08) |
| 2 | IV. Finale: Allegro moderato - Allegro energico | (31:13) |

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Producer: Beata Jankowska
Engineer: Otto Nopp
Music Notes: Keith Anderson

2 CD's

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