

**NAXOS**

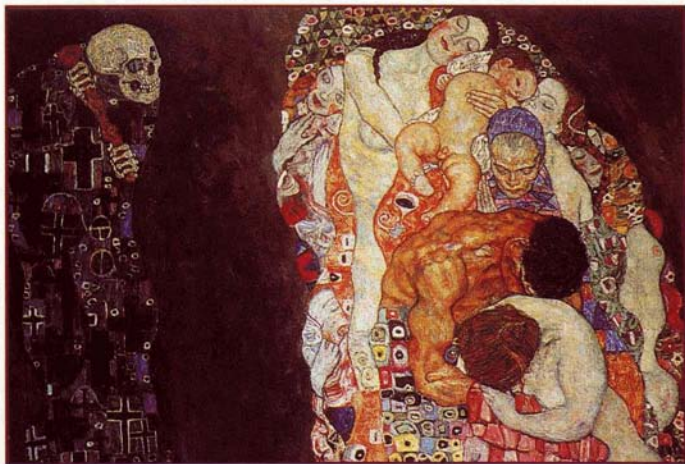
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# MAHLER

## Symphony No. 9

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra  
Michael Halász, Conductor



2 CD's

## **Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)**

### **Symphony No. 9**

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 of his parents, 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 ownership 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 an 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.

Mahler's marriage in 1902 to the twenty-year-old Alma Schindler, daughter of the painter Anton Schindler and a composition pupil of Zemlinsky, caused astonishment in Vienna. The marriage brought its pleasures and difficulties, not least with the death of the older of Mahler's two daughters in the summer of 1907. Alma's mother suffered a heart-attack, and Alma herself was found to be suffering from nervous strain and was ordered complete rest. The doctor attending Alma Mahler and her mother was asked to examine Mahler, and at once diagnosed serious weakness of the heart, a verdict confirmed shortly afterwards by eminent specialists in Vienna. The same year had brought his resignation from the Court Opera, where he directed his last performance in October, moving thereafter to New York, where he had a contract with the Metropolitan Opera at an uneasy time in its history. At the end of the New York opera season he returned to Austria, spending the summer at Toblach, where he also spent the following summer, after a further Metropolitan season in the winter of 1908 - 1909. It was at Toblach in the summer of 1908 that Mahler started work on his Ninth Symphony. He had entertained reservations about the composition of a ninth symphony. Beethoven had completed only nine symphonies, and there was something ominous about the number. *Das Lied von der Erde*, on the composition of which he was also engaged at this time, was originally conceived as a symphony, which it is in all but name. The Ninth Symphony was completed in New York in 1910, a year that brought unpleasant conflict with the ladies who controlled the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, with which Mahler had a new contract, after the end of his agreement with the Metropolitan Opera, where Toscanini now presided. In the summer he worked on a Tenth Symphony, a work he never finished. The Ninth

Symphony was only performed after the composer's death, when Bruno Walter introduced the work to Vienna in the spring of 1912.

The Ninth Symphony is scored for an orchestra of piccolo, four flutes, four oboes, with cor anglais, three clarinets, an E flat and bass clarinet, four bassoons, with a double bassoon, four horns, five trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba, a percussion section of timpani, bass drum, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, tam-tam and glockenspiel, three deeper bells, harp and strings. It opens with a movement of surpassing beauty. A brief introduction, containing the seeds of much that follows, leads to the principal theme, played by the second violins, with a counter-melody entrusted to the French horn. The movement, a farewell to the world, is in broadly sonata-allegro form, with a complex development of the very varied thematic and motivic material followed by a final recapitulation that brings the movement to a gently wistful conclusion after music that has moments of intense conflict.

The second movement, in the speed of a relaxed Ländler, marked somewhat clumsy and very coarse, opens, at least, in accordance with these instructions. The farewell motif, derived perhaps from Beethoven's *Das Lebewohl* sonata, is heard from the clarinets in a very different mood, before the fiddles strike up their heavy-footed Ländler. There is a waltz worthy of Baron Ochs and a gentle re-appearance of the Ländler, before the rumbustious return of the waltz. The final section of the Scherzo brings back the Ländler of the opening, a distorted waltz and reminiscences of the beginning of the movement in conclusion.

In the Rondo-Burleske, marked *Sehr trotzig*, very defiant, idea follows idea. There is a strong call to attention at the start that returns with emphatic force from the horns, leading to a second thematic element and a complexity of contrapuntal suggestion. A passage of intense feeling, implicit with yearning, is rudely interrupted by the E flat clarinet, but continues until the grotesque dance resumes, leading to a final *Presto*.

Something of the mood of the first movement is restored in the final Adagio, very slow and restrained, a hymn of tranquillity that increases in intensity. This opening theme is transformed in various ways in the music that follows, a poignant summary and farewell to a world of joy and pain, now transfigured. The symphony was written in the shadow of death, but in the last movement these shadows are dispersed, overwhelmed by a spirit of tranquil resignation and a perception of the eternal.

### **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 Strugała, Jerzy Maksymiuk, Stanisław 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.

## **Michael Halász**

Michael Halász's first engagement as a conductor was at the Munich Gärtnerplatz Theater, where, from 1972 to 1975, he directed all operetta productions. In 1975 he moved to Frankfurt as principal Kapellmeister under Christoph von Dohnányi, working with the most distinguished singers and conducting the most important works of the operatic repertoire. Engagements as a guest-conductor followed, and in 1977 Dohnányi took him to the Staatsoper in Hamburg as principal Kapellmeister. From 1978 to 1991 he was General Musical Director of the Hagen opera house and in 1991 he took up the post of Resident Conductor of the Vienna State Opera.

## Gustav Mahler

### Symphonie Nr. 9

Die neunte Symphonie wird im 19. Jahrhundert eine magische Grenze. Obwohl von den großen Komponisten des deutschsprachigen Raums eigentlich nur Ludwig van Beethoven an dieser Hürde scheiterte und über Skizzen zur Zehnten nicht hinauskam - etwas Unheilvolles scheint sich mit der symbolträchtigen Neun zu verbinden.

Auch Gustav Mahler fürchtete die Zahl als Ausdruck eines "Bis hierher und nicht weiter". Er fürchtete sie so sehr, daß er "Das Lied von der Erde" nicht in die offizielle Zählung aufnahm, sondern als "Eine Symphonie für Alt, Tenor und Orchester" gewissermaßen außer Konkurrenz laufen ließ.

Doch die Neunte, das weiß er, ist schließlich unausweichlich. Und so beginnt er im Sommer 1908, während er noch an dem "Lied von der Erde" arbeitet, mit den Skizzen zu einer weiteren Symphonie, die dann, wie es das Schicksal wollte, tatsächlich seine letzte vollendete Komposition wurde.

Gustav Mahlers emotionaler Zustand ist damals denkbar angespannt. Seine ältere Tochter ist 1907 gestorben; im selben Jahr tritt er nach einer grausamen Hetzkampagne der Presse von seinem Posten als Wiener Operndirektor zurück; und wiederum im selben Jahr wird bei ihm ein Herzfehler festgestellt. Außerdem ist die Ehe in eine Krise geraten - kurzum, die Zeichen stehen auf Sturm ...

Nun könnte man eine Musik erwarten, in der sich der Komponist weinerlich selbst bedauert. Doch schon nach wenigen Takten des ersten langsamen Satzes ("Allegro commodo") ist zu spüren, daß die Musik zwar tragisch, doch im tieferen Sinne auch tröstlich und hoffnungsvoll werden wird. Ein dunkles Vibrieren aus Harfentönen, gedämpften Hornrufen und Streichereinwürfen erzeugt eine traumartig-bedrohliche Atmosphäre, aus der sich allmählich das "Ewigkeitsmotiv" löst - eine zweitönige, absteigende Keimzelle, die Mahler bereits in seiner vierten Symphonie und dann wieder im "Lied von der Erde" verwendet hat. Die so entstehende unerträgliche Spannung entlädt sich immer wieder in mächtigen

Höhepunkten, doch schließlich verdrängt die Dunkelheit den Traum. Am Ende intonieren die Hörner noch einmal wie von ferne das Ewigkeitsmotiv.

Ein harter Schnitt, und jählings geht es über die Maßen irdisch zu, wenn mit rüdem Gepolter das Scherzo beginnt: Eine rabiate Auflehnung gegen die Todesgedanken des vorausgegangenen Riesensatzes; und doch nicht der trotzig Gipfel des Werks. Den läßt Mahler im Rondo "Allegro assai" folgen, in dem eine offensichtliche Hektik um sich greift, bis die teuflischen Grimassen die Oberhand gewinnen und ihren tobenden Reigen tanzen.

Dann kommt das Finale in Gestalt des zweiten langsamen Satzes: ein Adagio voller Fragen, banger Hoffnungen; Signale der durchlaufenen Tragödie kehren zurück, eine weite Melodie singt sich aus - vergebens. Der Zusammenhalt bröckelt, zerfasert, die Musik verklingt in einer unendlichen Stille ...

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## Gustav Mahler

### Symphonie n°9

Né en 1860, Gustav Mahler, après avoir occupé différents postes en Allemagne et en Autriche, était parvenu, en 1897, à la tête de l'Opéra de Vienne. Il régna pendant dix ans sur la prestigieuse institution, marquant d'une empreinte indélébile la vie musicale de la capitale autrichienne. Ces succès n'allaient cependant pas sans contreparties négatives. Absorbé par les tâches administratives et artistiques, Mahler se voyait contraint de consacrer de moins en moins de temps à la composition. Par ailleurs la volonté et l'intransigeance dont il faisait preuve dans la mise en oeuvre de ses choix esthétiques lui valurent bien des hostilités.

Peu après son mariage avec Alma Schindler, en 1902, Mahler était entré en contact, par l'intermédiaire de son épouse, avec plusieurs membres de la "Sécession" viennoise, dont le peintre Alfred Roller. Sa collaboration avec ce dernier aboutit à des productions parmi les plus remarquables réalisées durant la présence de Mahler à la tête du Hofoper.

1907 fut une année redoutable pour Mahler. En juillet il vit disparaître sa fille aînée: Maria, lors de leur séjour estival à Maiernigg. Le musicien apprit par ailleurs qu'il souffrait de graves problèmes cardiaques... Enfin, à Vienne, une campagne hostile, animée par la presse antisémite, battait son plein. Elle aboutit à sa démission de l'Opéra et à sa décision de partir pour les Etats-Unis. Mahler signa un contrat avec le Metropolitan Opera à partir de janvier 1908, rompu en 1910 quand il prit la direction du New York Philharmonic Orchestra.

Jusqu'en mai 1911, date de son décès à Vienne, Mahler partagea son existence entre les deux côtés de l'Atlantique.

C'est à l'automne 1909 que le compositeur acheva sa *9ème Symphonie*: le chiffre fatidique que, par superstition, Mahler avait refusé d'attribuer à son *Chant de la Terre*. Le destin se montra plus fort... La *9ème Symphonie* est la dernière oeuvre achevée du musicien. Cette partition mystérieuse a donné lieu à force commentaires. Mahler, on l'a vu, avait été profondément marqué par les

événements de 1907; sa vision du monde et de l'art en était sortie modifiée. La *9ème Symphonie* - un "Chant du cygne" dit-on parfois - en témoigne. On peut y lire un message d'adieu au monde, empreint de résignation - "O jeunesse! Disparue! O amour! Envolé!", écrit Mahler sur son manuscrit... L'oeuvre présente un profil singulier dans l'ensemble de la production symphonique du musicien. Par son organisation formelle d'abord: deux mouvements lents encadrent deux mouvements rapides. L'organisation interne de chacun d'entre eux offre également bien des surprises. Par ailleurs, la *9ème*, si elle demeure dans le cadre tonal, frappe par le climat d'incertitude et d'instabilité qui y règne souvent du fait des très nombreuses modulations dont use Mahler.

La *9ème Symphonie* fut créée après la disparition de Mahler, par Bruno Walter le 26 juin 1912 à Vienne, suscitant l'enthousiasme d'un Schönberg ou d'un Berg.

L'oeuvre débute par un *Andante comodo* en ré majeur. Dans ce mouvement, vaste flot musical, la substance thématique est en permanente métamorphose grâce à des procédés plus proches de la variation que du développement auquel est traditionnellement soumis un mouvement de symphonie.

Le deuxième mouvement: "*Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers*" (Dans un Tempo de Ländler commode) débute en ut majeur. On y distingue trois sections: un Ländler grotesque et ironique, une Valse, un Ländler marqué "ganz langsam".

Le troisième mouvement s'intitule "*Rondo-burlesque*". En la mineur, tonalité synonyme de tragique chez Mahler, ce mouvement très virtuose se caractérise par son climat ironique, violent, féroce qui ne restera pas sans écho chez un Chostakovitch.

Un *Adagio*, en ré bémol majeur, conclut la *9ème*. Ce dernier mouvement s'ouvre sur un ton solennel. Mahler y témoigne à nouveau d'audace et de volonté novatrice dans sa conception du développement. Puissance expressive, noblesse de l'inspiration, sentiment de résignation définissent cette page.

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**MAHLER Symphonies available on Naxos**

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Symphony No. 9 [2 CD's]	8.550535-6



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2 CD's

MAHLER: Symphony No. 9

NAXOS



8.550535-6

STEREO

# MAHLER

## Symphony No. 9

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra  
(Katowice)  
Michael Halász, Conductor

DDD

Playing  
Time:  
83'59"

## Symphony No. 9

### CD 1:

- 1 I. Andante comodo (28:51)**  
**2 II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers (16:56)**

### CD 2:

- 1 III. Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig (13:39)**  
**2 IV. Adagio: Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend (24:23)**

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the  
Polish Radio in Katowice,  
from 26th to 30th April, 1993.

Producer: Beata Jankowska

Engineer: Otto Nopp

Music Notes: Keith Anderson (English)  
Cris Posslac (German)  
Frédéric Castello (French)

2 CD's

English Text /  
Deutscher Text /  
Texte en français



Cover Painting: Death and Life by Gustav Klimt



NAXOS

MAHLER: Symphony No. 9

2 CD's

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