



DDD

8.550531

MAHLER

Symphony No. 7

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Michael Halász



Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Symphony No. 7 in E 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 German 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. The *Seventh Symphony* was composed in the summer months of 1904 and 1905, with work on the two *Nachtmusik* movements following immediately on the completion of the *Sixth Symphony*. The composition of the first, third and fifth movements took only four weeks in the summer of 1905, after which a much longer period was spent on careful orchestration of the work. The symphony was first performed in Prague on 17th September 1908, when it was coolly received by an audience that had now learned to accept the *Fourth Symphony*, leading Mahler to undertake various revisions. The work is scored for four flutes, with two piccolos, three oboes, cor anglais, E flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, double bassoon, tenor horn, four horns, three trumpets,

three trombones and tuba. The percussion section calls for timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tamtam, triangle, glockenspiel, tambourine, cow-bells and larger bells, while to the string section is added two harps, a mandolin and a guitar.

The first movement opens with a tenor horn-call, over the insistent and hushed rhythms of strings and woodwind and the ominous sound of the bass drum, with trombones and tuba. Material derived from the horn-call appears in the march which leads to an *Allegro con fuoco* with a marked theme for the four horns. The music moves on to a mood of bitter sweetness, before the re-appearance of the rhythmic figure derived from the opening horn-call. Distant trumpets lead to a passage for solo violin, at first with cor anglais, with the trumpets again ushering in a gentle mood of yearning, countered by the return of the solemn and ominous music of the opening. The fierce *Allegro* is heard again in which the familiar rhythmic and melodic figure is eventually transformed, with a poignant relaxation of tension before a brisker march is heard in a movement of infinite variety.

Horns open the first *Nachtmusik* movement, the first echoed by a second muted horn, followed by oboe, clarinet and cor anglais, in a texture that suggests the distances of the Austrian countryside. This is a prelude to a gentle evening hymn, although march rhythms again soon appear. A singing cello theme is heard, as the march makes its slow way forward. The answering horn-calls return, now with distant cow-bells and continuing suggestions of the rhythmic and melodic figure that had such a large part to play in the first movement. An expressive theme is introduced by the oboes in thirds before the slow night-march resumes, a midnight scene from some haunted painting by Caspar Friedrich, with momentary reminiscences of what has passed. There are answering bird-calls from the depths of the woods, before the procession disappears into the distance.

The *Scherzo*, described as shadowy (*schattenhaft*), is again haunted by the ghosts of the night, moving into a grotesque dance, to relax in a *Trio*, with its tender oboe theme and cello melody, with memories of the first movement. The dance returns, before the texture again becomes fragmented and the movement comes to an end.

The second *Nachtmusik*, marked *Andante amoroso*, is a serenade, making use of guitar and mandolin in a delicate texture that with solo violins, violas and lower strings and later the characteristic sound of the mandolin. A solo violin establishes the lyrical mood, with a tender theme entrusted to the horn, to which the oboe adds a further element. The violins offer a graceful theme and later have a more sombre melody to add, as the mood changes. The music of the opening returns to lead to a final section.

Night disappears at a stroke as the timpani introduce the final movement, instructed to play *mit Bravour*. The principal theme follows from trumpets and horns. The traditional rondo form, much expanded, leads to the first of a series of episodes, introduced by oboes and a rapid string theme which eventually assumes even greater importance. The form allows Mahler that juxtaposition of broken images, each repetition of the main theme varied by the addition of other material in a movement of firm optimism. This and the first movement provide a strikingly original and disturbing frame to the central three nocturnal movements which themselves continue something of the spirit of the *Wunderhorn* symphonies of earlier years.

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.

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.



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STEREO

Gustav
MAHLER
(1860 - 1911)

Symphony No. 7

Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra
Michael Halász

DDD

Playing
Time:
79'09"

Symphony No. 7

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|----------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Langsam - Allegro con fuoco | (20:52) |
| 2 | Nachtmusik: Allegro moderato | (16:54) |
| 3 | Scherzo: Schattenhaft | (9:42) |
| 4 | Nachtmusik: Andante amoroso | (14:00) |
| 5 | Rondo - Finale | (17:24) |

Recorded at the Concert Hall of the Polish National Radio
in Katowice from 28th November to 2nd December 1994.

Producer: Günter Appenheimer

Music Notes: Keith Anderson

Cover Painting: The Yearning for Happiness Finds Fulfillment
in Poetry - 1902 by Gustav Klimt



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