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THE WAYFARER

Intimations of Mortality

SIMON SPERO muses on Mahler's Psyche

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My Mahler 2

Listening to Gavin Plumley's enthralling exposition of Mahler's 5th Symphony, I was struck once again by the roller-coaster of conflicting emotions which the composer visits on the listener. From moments of repose or sublime poignancy, we are plunged abruptly into passages of turmoil, evoking anguish, even a sense of hysteria. This dichotomy may be one aspect of the composer's symphonic work which so touches the nerve of contemporary audiences, especially those of a younger generation.

A performance of Mahler's *Resurrection* Symphony is an emotionally draining experience; having been swept along on an exhilarating tide of intense but conflicting sensations, one is left stimulated but exhausted. It is hard to think of any other musical experience where such extremes of feeling are confronted in such proximity to one another. This facet of Mahler's musical personality is encountered repeatedly in his symphonic output and lends it a unique quality. This might lead one to speculate on the source of this seemingly perverse approach to symphonic composition.

It may be that Mahler's creative idiosyncrasy conveys an accelerated insight into our own psychological mood swings, mirroring the far more extreme mental and physical manifestations experienced by the composer. In other words, perhaps Mahler is expressing his own temperamental and physical volatility and his nervous energy through his music. This characteristic, above all, seems to me to set the music of Mahler apart from that of any other composer.

Striking contrasts of mood are present in the symphonies of many other composers but most often they are contained within separate movements. Where they are juxtaposed, as in Richard Strauss's *Alpine Symphony* or Prokofiev's 3rd Symphony, they are likely to be either programmatic or developed from a ballet score. These oscillations are present in the later Symphonies of Carl Nielson, for instance, composed during the decade or so after Mahler's death, but they are presented in a more coherent manner, almost as if an inevitable and foreseeable consequence of what has gone before.

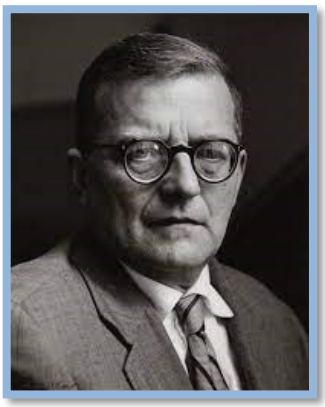
Only in the Symphonies of Dmitri Shostakovich will the listener occasionally encounter turbulent passages cheek by jowl with protracted sections of reflection and serenity within the same movement, analogous to those of Mahler.

The Symphonies of Shostakovich are brimful of passages of almost unbearable intensity, raw emotion and barely suppressed grief.

A sense of anxiety and agitation intrudes into nearly all his Symphonies and String Quartets, alongside violently contrasting sections of restless energy and momentum. Yet although his music is characterised by contrasting sensations and sharply disparate tempi, the passages are almost invariably enclosed within separate movements, allowing the listener a breathing space in which to readjust emotional responses, an indulgence seldom permitted in the Symphonies of Mahler.

For Shostakovich, at least from the mid-1930s until the early 1960s, his music was an expression of his insecurities and of his innermost feelings which at times he dared not convey in words, even to close friends. The emotional turmoil and unimaginable sense of unease in which he lived much of his life, together with any non-conformist views which he might have held, could only be expressed in the single outlet of his music. Yet even this abstract guise could only be the vehicle for his betrayal, as in his opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* devastatingly condemned in *Pravda* as "Muddle Instead of Music". Soon afterwards Shostakovich withdrew his 4th Symphony, fearful of further criticism.

The danger was palpable. For several years at this time, Shostakovich lived with a suitcase packed as a precaution against a nocturnal visit from the NKVD with a charge of formalism and the threat of the Gulag, or worse.



Shostakovich was an avid admirer of Mahler and perhaps it was the similarities in their psychological disposition which accounts for the strikingly equivocal emotions aroused from within the music of each. They shared a proclivity for musical grimaces, verging on self-mockery and occasional outbursts of disgust, though at whom or what this was directed is an open question.

The Symphonies of both composers contain within them what one might term as intimations of mortality, a feature also conspicuous in Tchaikovsky's 6th Symphony the *Pathetique*. In the case of Shostakovich this naturally arises from the tensions and vulnerabilities embedded in his working life whereas for Mahler it derived from a childhood permeated by the presence of death and from his own chronic ill health.

The 6th Symphony is perhaps the most bleakly pessimistic of all. Much admired by Arnold Schoenberg, it was considered by Mahler's wife Alma to be prophetic and it certainly seems to convey Mahler's state of mind as he was working on the Finale during the last weeks of June 1904 in his lakeside composing hut.

His letters to Alma at that time have a depressed tone with complaints about reading cheerless Tolstoy, the bad weather, his sense of loneliness and an intriguing preoccupation with the threat of small snakes, leavened only by the discovery of some sublime chamber works by Brahms. Separated from Alma, who was undergoing a gynaecological procedure following the birth of their second daughter, Mahler's mood may also have been disturbed by feelings of guilt at having chosen to work on his Symphony rather than to be at her side as she recuperated. Mahler was one of fourteen children, six of whom died in infancy, while a seventh, Ernst, died at the age of thirteen. A sister, Leopoldine, died in her twenties and his nephew Otto, a promising musician, committed suicide in 1896. Thus, by his mid-thirties Mahler was closely acquainted with mortality and it would have been surprising if these sombre memories had not intruded into his compositions. Mahler himself referred to the opening Movement of his *Resurrection* Symphony as funeral rites, and funeral marches are also prominent in his 1st and 5th Symphonies. Yet, as in the Scherzo of his 1st Symphony, the funeral march is infiltrated by a grotesque parody of a popular Viennese waltz tune, seemingly a gesture both unfeeling and inappropriate.

As a small boy, Mahler had once witnessed a particularly violent quarrel between his parents. Rushing out of the house in distress he had almost collided with an organ grinder playing through a tawdry Austrian melody.

Furthermore, on several occasions as the coffins of his tiny siblings were being carried out through the rear of his father's tavern, the young Mahler could hear the songs and merriment, uninterrupted, from the front bar. Incongruous associations such as these are woven into the fabric of the majority of Mahler's Symphonies.

Mahler's health had been poor since his childhood and was worsened by the stress of internal disputes and in-house rivalries in Budapest, Hamburg and Vienna, born at times out of simmering anti-Semitism. In his ten years or so as Artistic Director and conductor at the Vienna Opera, coinciding with the zenith of his career, his composing was limited to the summer months, outside the city's opera season.

His workload was onerous. In his inaugural season at the Vienna Opera in 1897-98 he conducted eleven performances of each of the twenty-three operas in production and during the succeeding ten years, composed *Kindertotenlieder,* the *Ruckertlieder* and the first sketches for *Das Lied von der Erde*, together with Symphonies 4-8. This span also included his marriage to Alma Schindler with its concomitant stresses, culminating in 1907 in the death of his elder daughter, Maria Anna, and the diagnosis of his life-threatening heart disease.

All his life Mahler had suffered from feverish chills, coughs, sore throats and debilitating migraines which rendered him incapable of movement, and in 1901 he barely survived a painful haemorrhoid operation. He was subject to violent transformations of mood, fits of depression and perhaps, understandably, a predisposition towards hypochondria.

His uncompromising nature imposed reckless demands upon his energy and stamina and he was driven by headstrong impulses regardless of circumstances. On a visit to Russia by train he apparently jumped from his overheated railway carriage at every station, striding along the platform impatiently, wearing neither an overcoat nor gloves, seemingly heedless of the sub-zero temperatures. For a man with a heart condition this was surely tempting providence. Yet as Bruno Walter, who knew him well, noted, impulse ruled his life.

The creative juices are invariably stimulated by movement and activity, especially walking, and perhaps Mahler was unable to remain in his seat while the train was stationary. Nevertheless, his compulsion to expose himself to extremes of sensation reflects an addiction which is echoed in his Symphonies. Might there have been an element of fatalism in Mahler's psyche, born of the tragically early death of family members or even the insanity which overtook two talented friends from his student days, Hugo Wolf and Hans Rott?

The summer months, free from conducting duties, were spent at Maiernigg on the shore of the Carinthian Wörthersee. In the woods, some two hundred feet above his villa, was Mahler's composing hut with its glorious view across the lake. It was here that he composed six of his Symphonies.

His wife Alma records an unvarying routine. Rising by half past six he would ring for his cook to take his breakfast up to his hut, clambering up a steep path. Before lunch, after a morning's work, he and Alma would go down to the lakeside with their two children. Mahler would swim out into the lake, return to sunbathe until he was baked brown, only to plunge back into the water, repeating the process four or five times. The process of heating up his body and then rapidly cooling it down in the cold water, quite apart from its cardiac effect, suggests a predilection for experiencing a juxtaposition of extremes. Might it be that this physical addiction also found expression in his music, plunging from one extreme sensation to another?

Was this the stimulus that Mahler
demanded of himself?
And of his audience?

To Live for you! To Die for You

In the concluding part of his survey of the Mahler relationship ANTHONY CANTLE focuses on Mahler's meeting with Freud

Concerns about Mahler's state of mind shared by Alma and close friends saw him agree to seek psychological help. A distant relative of Alma's, Dr Richard von Nepallek, who was later to become a member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, recommended Sigmund Freud.

Freud and Mahler met in the Dutch city of Leiden, birthplace of Rembrandt, late in the afternoon of 26th August 1910. Freud was on holiday with his family at the time, staying about ten miles from Leiden in the seaside resort of Noordwijk. Of the two, Freud had the far easier journey, less than an hour on a steam train to Leiden. For Mahler it involved an arduous set of overnight train journeys from Austria, through to Cologne, then to Amsterdam and on to Leiden.

A popular canard, not helped by Freud's own use of the term, is that Mahler had an analysis with Freud whereas the rather more mundane truth applies to what was in fact one afternoon's thoughtful work by Freud. They were never to meet again. No consulting room was involved. Instead, they greeted each other at what was the Golden Turk cafe (now a supermarket) and they walked through Leiden's parks and canals, talking for a little over four hours before Mahler left later that night. We might best think of this event as an analytic conversation between two very serious men, each I think rather fascinated by the other and having several things in common. They were similar in age, sharing broadly the same language, both Jewish, commanding reputations in their respective fields and, importantly, being more successful than their fathers. Each was their mother's first and favourite child, each having lost younger brothers and both living and working in the same city.

Any help Mahler may have been seeking from Freud's wisdom might in certain respects equate with the assessment consultations of today between clinician and patient.

As is sometimes likely with any consultee, we know that Mahler was quite equivocal in allowing the consultation. According to Ernest Jones, Mahler cancelled his appointment three times.

We know that Freud's bill of 300 Crowns was only settled after Mahler's death.

It should be remembered that the psychoanalyst of 2023 is a rather different creature from the one Mahler met in the Netherlands 113 years earlier. Things change, theories alter and undergo revision. Technique and practice can acquire fresh vitality and impetus for change in the slipstream of new ways of thinking and models of good practice.

The meeting with Freud seems to have assisted Mahler with a retrieval of his equilibrium, sufficiently so for him to maintain his conducting and to manage his disillusionment with Alma. I believe he died knowing that her passion for Gropius remained undimmed.

Freud contributed to the speculations surrounding his meeting with Mahler. He was somewhat indiscreet in choosing to discuss the Leiden encounter when, many years later during his analysis of Princess Marie Bonaparte, he referred to it in sufficient detail for her to record it in her diaries.

There is some evidence that Freud spoke of it again in correspondence with one colleague in particular as well as alluding to it, this time rather more cautiously, at one of the Wednesday evening scientific meetings of his psychoanalytic collaborators in a monthly tradition that continues to the present day in psychoanalytic institutes both in London and elsewhere.

Sad though it is to say, Freud would seem to have compromised, if not actually breached, Mahler's expectation of confidentiality. However, this needs to be set in context as by then several others would have known of the meeting between the two as a result of Alma's need to utilise some of the things Freud is reported to have said for the purpose of aligning Freud's sympathy and understanding only with Alma's view of the problems in the marriage and the apportionment of blame.

Apart from whatever Mahler had chosen to tell Alma about his meeting with Freud there are, to my knowledge, only three sources of information concerning the Leiden meeting: Freud's analysis recorded by Marie Bonaparte, Freud's colleague and biographer, Ernst Jones; and a Viennese colleague of Freud's, Theodore Reik. Their own recollections involve the three referring to what Freud himself had recalled fifteen years after the event.

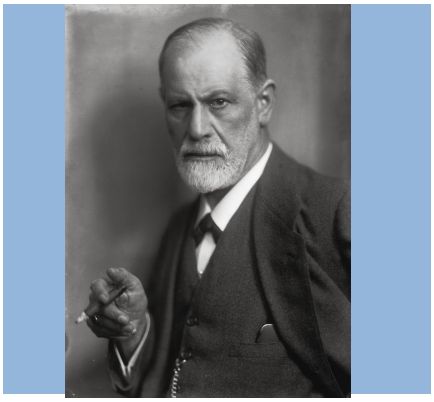
Utilising Marie Bonaparte's own notes, this is her account of the conversation she had initiated with Freud about his meeting with Mahler:

MB: What was he like?

SF: Mahler gave me the impression of being a genius, yet at the same time somehow curiously ape like. He has been dead a long time so I suppose I can tell you something about him. He came to see me because of his marriage. At the time the marriage was not going well although he was a normally potent man and loved his wife.

MB: Was he faithful to her?

SF: Aside from her he only had a few love affairs. Yes, he was faithful to her. But she no longer excited him. On our walk he spoke of every possible thing. And, as it turned out, after this analysis their relationship was happier. He demonstrated an intuitive understanding of analysis. He didn't know much about me and had not had analysis before, but right away he was in his element. What impressed him greatly was when I said to him, "Your mother's name was Marie?" "But how do you know!" he exclaimed. Of course, I could see it from what he was telling me - he had an enormous fixation on his mother. "But how was it," I asked him, "that you could marry a woman whose name was not Marie?" "But," he exclaimed, "she is called Alma-Marie!"



As it happened, names were significant for his wife as well. Her father was the Emil Schindler, the famous Viennese painter whose statue is in the public gardens. So that she fell in love with a man called Mahler.

But here's what I want to get to: Suddenly Mahler cried out, "Now I understand something about my music. I have often been criticised for crude changes from the noblest melody to one that is banal." And he told me the following story: His father was a peculiar person who harassed his mother with irrational, pathological jealousy. Young Mahler had often to witness such scenes. One day, while sitting in his room, he heard his father in the next room engaged in a violent scene with his mother. He eavesdropped by the door until he could bear it no longer, and then ran out into the street. There was a barrel organ playing a well-known tune, an old Viennese melody.

According to Marie Bonaparte at this point: Freud hummed the melody rather out of tune. The boy Mahler heard this and for the rest of his life he reproduced in his music the strange contrast of a common hurdy-gurdy tune alongside one reminiscent of the violence of his father in the scene between his parents.

MB: That's precisely the character of Mahler's music. Perhaps for a genius neurosis is essential. If Mahler had been analysed and cured of his neurosis, his work would probably have been very different. What was the name of the town where you saw him?

SF: It was Leiden. We were staying by a lake not far from Leiden. It must have been somewhere between 1910 and 1912. The year of Mahler's death.

Theodore Reik, a Viennese psychologist, had also been an admirer of Mahler's music and, learning that Freud had once met Mahler, he had written to Freud in 1935 with news of himself and his work but additionally asked what he could tell him about having once met Mahler.

The following is the relevant section from Freud's reply:

"Dear Doctor,

I analysed Mahler for an afternoon in the year 1912 (or 1913) in Leiden. If I believe reports, I achieved much with him at that time. This visit appeared necessary to him, because his wife at the time rebelled against the fact that he withdrew his libido from her. In highly interesting expeditions through his life history, we discovered his personal conditions for love, especially his Holy Mary complex. I had plenty of opportunity to admire the capability for psychological understanding of this man of genius. No light fell at the time on the symptomatic fade of his obsessional neurosis. It was as if you would dig a single shaft through a mysterious building.

Yours, Freud."

Alma Mahler's own version of what took place appears in her memoirs: "Mahler was churned to the very bottom. It was at this time that he wrote these outcries and ejaculations addressed to me in the draft score of the Tenth Symphony. He realised that he had lived the life of a neurotic and suddenly decided to consult Sigmund Freud (who was then on holiday at Leiden in Holland). He gave him an account of the strange states of mind and his anxieties and Freud apparently calmed him down.

He reproached him with vehemence after hearing his confession. 'How dared a man in your state ask a young woman to be tied to him?' he asked. In conclusion, he said: 'I know your wife. She loved her father and she can only choose and love a man of his sort. Your age of which you are so much afraid is exactly what attracts her. You need not be anxious. You loved your mother and you look for her in every woman. She was care worn and ailing, and unconsciously you wish your wife to be the same.' Freud was right in both cases."

A detailed evaluation of these accounts of the meeting in 1910 and their veracity is not possible here. In other writing I have cautioned against being over confident in our inferences and reconstructions and besides, years of psychoanalytic practice have helped me to be content that we can never know for certain what really happened. Instead, I wish to emphasise that in some respects the reports of what may or may not have been said by Freud or Mahler eclipse a far more important feature of their meeting; the crucial yet invisible value of a troubled and troublesome man allowing himself for the first time in his life to seek psychological help. For Mahler this meant becoming acquainted with an outcome still found by patients and couples over a century later when seeking the integrity of a listening and non-retaliatory mind: to leave feeling understood.

On the train back that evening in August 1910 Mahler sent Alma the following poem.

The nightmares dispelled by the force of persuasion
Dispersed are the torments of self-contemplation
In one single chord my hesitant notions converge with the power of searing emotions
I Love You
Three words that support and maintain me
Life's melody rising from sorrow and pain
Oh Love Me
Three words that I know that sustain me
The bass note to each and to every refrain
I Love You
Three words that remain what I live for
With joy will I forfeit the world all around
Oh Love Me
You the tempest that blew ashore
Bless Me
Dead to the World
My haven found

Under the Influence

PENNY YOUNG tells a tale of two Resurrections

Mahler: Symphony 2, Worcestershire Symphony Orchestra (WSO)/Keith Slade, Worcester Cathedral, 13/05/23; Leamington Sinfonia/Joe Davies, All Saints Church, Leamington Spa, 24/06/23.

I never thought I would compare Mahler Symphonies to buses but you wait seemingly forever for one and then two come along in quick succession. This Symphony had been on my bucket list for such a long time that I could hardly believe my luck when it arrived on my home patch in Worcester.

For those unfamiliar with the work, it is not about the Christian Resurrection. Mahler was from a Jewish background and had yet to convert to Christianity when he wrote it between the years 1888 and 1894. While this huge Symphony is an ambitious challenge for an amateur orchestra, even a well-established one such as the WSO, I had every faith in it, having caught its very powerful Mahler 6th a few years ago. The Orchestra had advertised for experienced choral singers who presumably could learn the piece with minimal rehearsal and, having heard this Symphony innumerable times, I thought I knew it fairly well.

You might have heard of the Pink Panther, even pink elephants, but what about the pink giraffe? No, not a children's nursery, nor a night club, nor even an exotic cocktail; it is one of the animals depicted in the huge and beautifully detailed stained glass window at the West end of Worcester Cathedral, overlooking the river. Unaccountably, it is a bright almost fuchsia pink.

This unique creature was well in my sights from the choir seats above the orchestra.

As dusk fell and the desk lights of the orchestra became more prominent, I was glad of the extra layer I had put on. Yes, you are sitting near a lot of other bodies all giving off heat but heat of course rises, in this case drawn into the cavernous vastness of the cathedral ceiling.

Even Mahler's most devoted fans might admit that he is something of a Marmite composer who divides opinions. I can almost hear the outraged howls, but sometimes I can understand why people criticise him for being bombastic and over-long. In the wrong hands the First Movement can be like wading through treacle but vigorous conducting by Keith Slade did not drag the pace down, holding the 100-piece orchestra together in this vast Movement most commendably.

The Second, Haydnesque, Movement comes as a sharp contrast to what has preceded it, more digestible to those of the audience unused to Mahler's emotional and orchestral 'excesses'. There is a good deal of variety in this Symphony, the Third Movement being different again in mood and style.

How well did we do?

In the final choral Movement I was a little put off by a chap behind me singing half a semitone flat and half a bar behind. You always get one. Some of the ladies, I suspect, thought *pp* stood for *Pretty Powerful*.

There was a substantial delay in composition between the first four Movements and the Finale which came to Mahler in a rush of inspiration at the funeral of the famous conductor Hans von Bülow who had been critical of his music. You may ask how efficient a use of resources it is to have a choir of around 100 people sitting as quiet as mice for over an hour but Mahler was not to write a fully choral symphony until his Eighth in 1906.

In the afternoon rehearsal it all came together for the first time. The impact of that glorious sound at such close quarters in that incomparable acoustic must have triggered an adrenalin rush because I surprised myself, reaching some of the top notes with which I had previously struggled; but then Mahler has that miraculous life-changing effect on many people, including Sir Simon Rattle, who decided to become a conductor on first hearing this Symphony.

Unfortunately, I missed the warm-up for the evening performance and it made all the difference. We sounded amazing, though, as I was later able to confirm from a short video clip uploaded to Facebook by one of the choristers. Only a heart of stone could fail to be moved by that rapturous upward sweep to the final chorus.

Did we do justice to Mahler's apocalyptic vision? Undoubtedly. The audience responded with the kind of enthusiasm that this monumental piece never fails to inspire. It was a night I will never forget.

Grateful thanks are due to Vincent Kirk of the WSO who kindly arranged for GMS flyers to be printed and distributed to the audience.

I had actually signed up for the second Resurrection by the Leamington Sinfonia before hearing about the Worcester concert but it is much easier to perform in a symphony that is still fresh in your mind than to have to learn something from scratch. Having missed the first rehearsal altogether, in the second rehearsal I had sung in the first a capella section of the chorus before hearing the orchestra at all.

It was awesome then to experience the radiant orchestral vision illuminating every crevice of the ancient church, putting living flesh on its dry bones: a Resurrection I think the composer would have appreciated.

In the rehearsals, as well as in the performance, the chorus stayed in tune requiring no support, ready for the seamless re-entry of the orchestra.

In true Mahlerian tradition, conductor Joe Davies was an exacting task master but produced results. So many people wanted to take part that he got as many choristers again as the hundred he originally requested. To me, this Symphony demands the kind of love and commitment its composer put into it, the choral section requiring not only attention to dynamics, note lengths and changes of time signature, but also, if possible, an understanding of its meaning. It is a tall order, from the subtle, almost inaudible first entry of the chorus, to giving it all you've got at the end. But then Mahler makes you want to give it all you've got.

The First Movement was taken at a brisk tempo and the conductor did in fact observe the break that Mahler specified between the First and Second Movements. I thought that the soloists were particularly fine. Mahler is not always kind to his second sopranos, in some places supplying notes for us, in other places not. While it was never my ambition to sing Mozart's Queen of the Night, inevitably and frustratingly over time I have lost some of my top notes. In the privacy of my car on the way over I attempted some scales and arpeggios belatedly trying to loosen up those stubborn vocal chords, with limited success. Fortunately, I know the route well. Driving under the influence of Mahler is otherwise not recommended!

Having had to make a quick getaway after the concert, I missed the fact that our performance had been graced by the presence of a Mahler relative, Dr Elizabeth Schächter, whose grandfather was a first cousin of Gustav Mahler. She later said in an email: "It was an absolute pleasure to have been associated with the magnificent musical project of Mahler 2. The performance on Saturday was extraordinary, so powerful and vibrant; the massed choirs of the Finale brought tears to my eyes. It was one of the most moving musical experiences of my life. The standing ovation was richly deserved."

I heartily concur with her opinion. We hope to hear more from Dr Schächter in the future and look forward to the Leamington Sinfonia's performance of Mahler's 6th planned for later in the year.

Review

Mahler: Das Lied von Der Erde:

Claudia Huckle (con), Nicky Spence (ten), Justin Brown (pf) Champs Hill Records)

Brigitte Fassbaender (mez), Thomas Moser (ten), Cyprien Katsaris (pf), DG

Piotr Beczala (ten), Christian Gerhaher (bar), Gerold Huber (pf), Sony Classical.

Mahler's own piano version of *Das Lied von Der Erde*, discovered in the 1980s, was swiftly overtaken by the much more sumptuous orchestral rendering which is often counted as part of his Symphony cycle; so that for the past decade we have only had the Fassbaender/Moser rendition with Katsaris.

Now, in a single year, we have two new recordings, the first a conventional line-up with a contralto and a tenor, the second with a tenor and a baritone.

The obvious attraction of the piano arrangement is the potential for much greater intimacy but the greatest demand of the musicians is to supply colour.

Claudia Huckle is very steady although she occasionally conflates richness with colour so that the overall texture can become a little heavy compared with Fassbaender; but Nicky Spence is spot-on throughout.

Any Gerhaher recording has to be judged in its own terms and his understanding with Huber is instinctive; but although Beczala gives it all he's got, the idea doesn't really work as there is a lack of vocal contrast.

The pianists, in ascending order of effectiveness, are Brown, Katsaris and Huber and it's hard to fault Fassbaender or Gerhaher in anything; but if I could only have one of the three I would take Huckle/Spence even if it has just an element of good old Viennese chocolate cake in it. - Editor.

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MY MAHLER 1
Craig Brown
Revelation

If it could be called, prosaically, an introduction, perhaps it was more, in ornate terms, a visionary moment. It was 1973 or '74 and I was standing in a small group in one of the many administrative offices at the Royal Free Hospital and I happened to mention, when our plans for the weekend entered the discussion, that I hoped to get a ticket for a performance of the Mahler 5th Symphony at the Royal Festival Hall. I was more than surprised when a colleague within earshot, whom I knew only slightly, turned and exclaimed, "Oh, good for you, I'd love to do that!"

I blinked, wondering if I had misheard or misunderstood. "What, go to a Mahler concert?" A smile and an enthusiastic nod. "Yes, really. I've got a record of the Bruch Violin Concerto, but there's so much more I want to learn about."

The lady's name was Valerie Valdini. She was twelve years older than me and, according to general rumour, brave and uncomfortable in a difficult marriage. She was later to confide in me that her husband kept her on a fairly tight rein and disapproved of her ambition to explore music and culture. After all, she had a family to run. I asked her if her husband would mind if she accompanied me to a concert. "What's it to do with him?" she retorted archly. "I can't let him control everything I want to do."

So I bought two stalls tickets.

I normally pride myself on a strong historical memory, so it frustrates me that, today, I cannot remember either the evening's conductor or the opening programme; but the LSO played Mahler 5 and, as the orchestra assembled on stage, I tried to subdue my apprehension. If someone is learning to swim, you do not plunge them into the Atlantic Ocean. Surely Mahler 5 was too steep a learning curve, a misjudgement liable to disappoint both of us, wherein discouragement rudely obliterated appetite. Well, too late now, I thought, we're here, the deed is done. As the music unfolded, I sneaked frequent, furtive glances at Valerie's face, but she appeared bright-eyed and attentive, and I did my best to relax and enjoy the experience.

And then…the fifth Movement reached its radiant apotheosis. I felt a hand squeeze my arm. I turned, looked – and to my amazement, tears of rapture were coursing down my friend's cheeks. She was loving the sound and the joy and the excitement. From that moment on, there was to be no going back. There was, instead, to be more Mahler, more questioning, more of this beautiful companionship in concert halls around the country.

This is not the place to elaborate on the turbulent times that followed. Suffice it to say, Valerie and I were married in 1975 and enjoyed 44 years of immense happiness together. I am not suggesting that Mahler was responsible for this condition, but he often featured in our leisure lives and for that, quite apart from the music itself, I am forever grateful to him. Valerie's favourite Mahler works were the choral symphonies and, of course, the 5th. She also liked Bruckner, Wagner and Sibelius. She heartily disliked Bartok and Stravinsky. Shostakovich she could take or leave.

My wife died in 2019. Now, whenever, I play Mahler 5 on my stereo or on You Tube, I never fail to call through to her picture in the corner and say, "Here we are, dear. Remember this? I think they're playing our music!"

"My Mahler"

Craig Brown's moving article is the first in the series planned for each issue of The Wayfarer.

I shall be pleased to receive articles of between 500 and 700 words from readers describing some aspect of Mahler which means a lot to them: it might be a symphony, a first time experience, a resort to music during a special time in your life. The tone of the contributions should be conversational rather than academic as I want the author's personality to shine through. I will try to edit the contributions as little as possible except to make them conform to the Wayfarer's house style.

Editor

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Daniel Harding , President of the Gustav Mahler Society UK , conducted a gala concert with the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester. at the Evian Music Festival on July 2. The star soloist was Martha Argerich who gave a scintillating performance of Beethoven's First Piano Concerto. After the interval Harding directed the orchestra in a vibrant interpretation of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony.

Pictured before the concert with Daniel Harding is GMSUK Committee member Leslie Bergman who is also on the Board of the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester.

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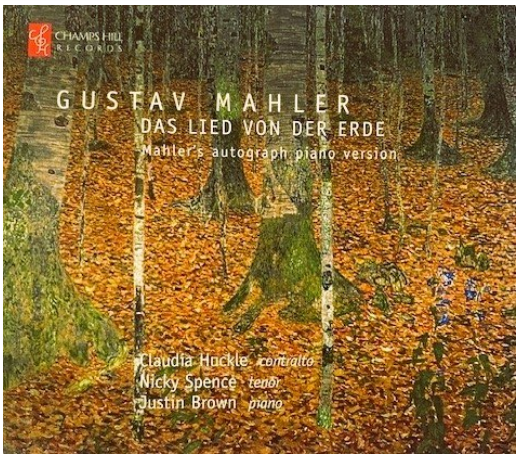

Ian Willett writes:

"Last year, GMS UK was one of the sponsors of a Mahler CD produced by Champs Hill Records. What made the production special, and out of the normal run of projects sponsored by the Society, was the music itself.

Members will be only too aware of the glories of *Das Lied Von Der Erde* in its full orchestral garb - one of his greatest masterpieces. However this recording offered something out of the ordinary, namely Mahler's own piano arrangement of the score which remained unpublished until re-discovered in the late 1980s. This aspect is what attracted the Committee's support and led to our financial involvement in the project, particularly as there have only been a few previous recordings.

This CD was published in early 2023 and is born of the Covid lockdown period which allowed the artists the space to re-assess this version of the score. The CD features Claudia Huckle (contralto), Nicky Spence (tenor) and Justin Brown (piano). Generously, Champs Hill made a supply of CDs available to GMS members (pre public release) and those of you who took advantage of this will be aware (from the CD booklet) of the musical learning and technical adjustments which were part and parcel of coming to terms with the music in this radically different form.

The Committee is pleased to say Claudia, Justin and the recording producer Alexander Van Ingen have agreed to give a presentation to GMS members on all aspects of the production, and provide an insight into how such CDs are produced.

The presentation will take place on 13 October 2023 at 7.00 pm in the Farringdon Room of the St Bride Foundation, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London EC4Y 8EQ. Light refreshments will be provided. Tickets are £20 per person.

In his review of the CD, in the March edition of the Gramophone magazine, Hugo Shirley summed up his response by writing '…This is a welcome recording that will, one hopes, bring a new audience to this rewarding version of this wonderful work'.

The Committee hopes that as many members as possible will join this very special event."

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