

## BBC Philharmonic's performance with Dame Sarah Connolly.

On 30 September 2023, the BBC Philharmonic conducted by John Storgards performed a programme including **Six Orchestral Songs** composed by **Alma Mahler** who was of course the wife, and later the widow, of **Gustav Mahler**. The songs were orchestrated by **Colin and David Matthews**, (well-known for their collaboration with **Deryck Cooke** on the **Performing Version of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 10**).

**Darren Niman** was at the **Bridgewater Hall in Manchester** for the performance. He writes:

"The programme was excellent, comprising the Janacek Sinfonietta - wonderful, with additional brass and excellent Timpani writing - the Tchaikovsky Symphony No. 6 - mind-blowing, heart wrenching, emotionally draining and quite bipolar, a tremendous exercise in humanity wearing its heart on a sleeve - and Six Orchestral Songs by Alma Mahler.

The songs we heard were:

- 1 **Die stille Stadt** [The Silent Town] (No. 1 from Five Lieder, pubd. 1910)
- 2 **Laue Sommernacht** [Mild summer night] (No. 3 from Five Lieder)
- 3 **Licht in der Nacht** [Light in the Night] (No. 1 from Four Lieder, pubd. 1915)
- 4 **Waldseligkeit** [Woodland Rapture] (No. 2 from Four Lieder)
- 5 **In meines Vaters Garten** [In my father's garden] (No. 2 from Five Lieder)
- 6 **Bei dir ist es traut** [I feel warm and close with you] (No. 4 from Five Lieder)

The mezzo-soprano was the distinguished and inimitable Dame Sarah Connolly.

Dame Sarah's appearance alone is imposing; she has tremendous stage presence. At the Bridgewater Hall she was resplendent in a blue velvet coat with gold embroidery. She began to sing and ... what a voice! Dame Sarah had the whole house wrapped around her little finger.

We now know the context of Alma's compositions from a study of Gustav Mahler's letters. Despite what we feel about his genius in composition, it is clear - and a difficult concept to deal with - that he effectively wanted and insisted on superiority over his wife. He could not allow her to overshadow his output; he could not risk that she might become more famous than himself.

Whether this was a matter of his own insecurity, and perhaps caused by the context of increasingly pejorative attitudes towards race and religion, we can only speculate. This was a relatively rare opportunity to hear Alma's compositions. When we hear her work, we can begin to judge for ourselves whether her music would have overshadowed Gustav's."

**Darren Niman**