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How Mahler Got To Sheffield

Professor GEORGE NICHOLSON
describes the Mahler journey which brought the Resurrection to Sheffield

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To Live for You, to Die for You, part 6

Intimations of Mortality

On March 19th this year a huge, enthusiastic audience assembled at the City Hall for the grand finale of a weekend of music presented by Classical Sheffield: a performance of Mahler's 2nd. For three days the city had show-cased local choirs, chamber ensembles and orchestras in a number of venues, with a larger-scale event taking place each evening: a Halle Orchestra concert on the Friday night, followed on Saturday by the Sheffield Bach Choir in the B Minor Mass which I conducted and, finally, the Mahler. What was particularly striking about that final concert was that the Sheffield Philharmonic, the Hallam Sinfonia and the choirs brought together for the performance were all amateur performers. The soloists from Sheffield, Ella Taylor and Anne Harvey, have made fine careers in the wider world and the conductor who held the whole thing together was George Morton, chiefly known for his championing of live film scores and for his chamber arrangements of many well-known orchestral works.

Apart from taking advantage of another opportunity to hear the Mahler live, I was present as Chair of the panel that had adjudicated the Stella Jockel Choral Competition. This had been organised in conjunction with the Sheffield Philharmonic Chorus in memory of one of its former singers.

Young composers were invited to write an a cappella work for the choir as a curtain-raiser for the Symphony. In the event, the audience heard two excellent first-prize winning pieces. At a pre-concert event I discussed the background to the competition with Chair Trisha Cooper; and Alex Burns, author of an MA Dissertation on Mahler, provided a brief introduction to the Symphony. For me, that evening proved to be something of a family event because a number of my former students were actively involved, not only Alex, George and Ella but also a number of the orchestral players. This prompted me to look back on my own engagement with Mahler's music and the performances I have promoted over the years; and, indeed, the key role of the composer in my attempts as a teenager to piece together a coherent sense of musical history. The exercise has brought me to a clearer understanding of why so many of us see Mahler as a figure of such great historical importance. As a pianist I had often performed Mahler's songs, but I came to conducting much later and it took some careful planning before I found the opportunity to programme one of his Symphonies. Most of them are far too difficult for a university orchestra, even if the forces are readily available. I had set my sights on the 1st but it had to wait until I could be sure of mustering the required complement of seven horns. When the moment came, George Morton happened to be playing first trumpet in the orchestra. A few years later we went on to programme the *Ruckertlieder* with Ella, already a very fine soloist. Alex Burns was in the trumpet section on that occasion.

Looking back further still, my first contact with Mahler dates back to secondary school when his work was not nearly so well-known as it is now. I grew up in the North-East where opportunities to hear non-repertoire music live were very scarce. Occasionally, the Northern Sinfonia would programme an interesting new work, and in the summer for several years a week-long festival of contemporary music ran in Durham which gave me direct contact with experienced practitioners of new work and exposure to all kinds of 20th Century repertoire.

Apart from these rare treats I relied very heavily on the BBC to broaden my musical horizons. In those far-off days it was much more progressive than it is now, and Radio 3 maintained a Reithian stance in its commitment to educating and informing the audience as much as entertaining it. The legendary Invitation Concerts introduced us to the latest European works by Boulez and Stockhausen and Maxwell Davies interleaved with Renaissance music and, needless to say, there was unquestioned commitment to the idea that the newest work by Britten or Tippett should receive very wide exposure. Together with a handful of like-minded schoolfriends I pursued the latest offerings with great relish. We had discovered Stravinsky and Schoenberg at about the age of fourteen and were eager to hunt down Webern's music and that of the later composers who had fallen under his influence. I well remember dashing home from school to catch a series on the Second Viennese School. Through my piano lessons, the music of Bach and the classics up to Brahms became very familiar, supplemented by our school record library, although the collection was modest and rather idiosyncratic, only containing Mahler's 6th which I got to know quite well so that it soon became my ambition to be able to write something as affecting as the slow movement. At the same time that Radio 3 was nourishing my taste for contemporary music, BBC Television broadcast the Deryck Cooke completion of Mahler's 10th from the 1964 Proms. Here, to my mind, was the missing link drawing together the before and after of my trawl through musical history. This was the music that laid the ground for Berg and Schoenberg and all that followed, at once traditional and progressive; and how devastatingly heart-breaking! Has anyone ever composed anything quite as beautiful and fragile as that flute theme in the Finale?

My perception of the classical tradition now made complete sense and it was Mahler, a father figure for Schoenberg (with all the Freudian overtones that carries with it) who was the vital creative personality at the heart of it, representing the transition between the worlds of the 19th and 20th Centuries.

At about the same time as I began to encounter the Mahler Symphonies, the *Radio Times* published an article by Alexander Goehr introducing the 1st Symphony. I fear I came across it too late to hear the broadcast but I can well remember its tone and the nature of the argument. His aim was to prepare the listener for an unsettling journey through a remarkable musical landscape incorporating elements of birdsong and snatches of military band music and klezmer, not to mention *Frère Jacques* in the minor mode. Goehr counselled patience and indulgence, and suggested that in the end the experience would prove to be worthwhile.

From today's standpoint Mahler's reputation is firmly established and I can't imagine such advice would be needed now; on the contrary, there is perhaps a sense in which we need to remain alive to the eccentricity and abiding modernity of his music, for it is by its very nature unsettling and questioning and even to some extent self-doubting. There are naturalistic or purely figurative sounds in some of the Symphonies that operate as sound effects rather than purely musical impulses, typically the cowbells in the 6th, or, more problematically, its infamous hammer blows. Often the effect is rather like that of recognising a bus ticket in a cubist collage, a clash of register between the abstract and the representational that questions the nature of the artifice. In experiencing musical communication a common perception is that the orchestra in some way embodies a kind of consciousness, feeling and expressing emotions of its own (or perhaps those of its composer), even though it is self-evident in the concert hall that the persona is made up of a number of individuals working together to create the result. In relation to this concept, I would draw attention to a remarkable passage in the Finale of the *Resurrection* Symphony that remains modern and disturbing even after all this time. While the on-stage orchestra plays in a heightened emotional way the off-stage band interpolates fragments of a march. The effect is of the unseen players articulating the internal concerns that give rise to the anxiety that finds expression in the on-stage music, as if we are experiencing both those unstated, unacknowledged worries and the all too conscious unease resulting from them.

In several of his works Mahler is keen to exploit the overtly theatrical possibilities provided by the stationing of performers outside the field of vision of the audience. Perhaps this sense of the interplay of the conscious and the unconscious is what he was aiming for.

The interplay of text and music in Mahler is another intriguing aspect of his work. In the 2nd Symphony we are given the opportunity to hear words and music united, as is the case archetypically in Beethoven's 9th, and eventually the choir sings thematic material we heard earlier in a purely instrumental form. Interestingly, the same process operates in Tippett's 3rd, another piece very consciously written in the wake of Beethoven. What happens in effect is that the import of the musical message becomes elucidated and brought into focus by the superimposition of text: the abstract becomes figurative. But in the Mahler something else happens in the 3rd Movement: music that was originally conceived as song appears shorn of its text. It remains to be seen whether we can actually perceive the import of the text when it is no longer there. No doubt for Mahler the purely instrumental carried some memory or trace of the lost words, but how does this work for an audience?

My experience of Mahler's music has been long and very rewarding. As far as I am concerned he stands at a critical moment in the development of the Viennese tradition, providing a direct link between the symphonic heritage of the 18th and 19th Centuries and the new music that was to follow. The tensions between conservative and radical forces are palpable in his musical language and can be seen as directly related to the difficulties he experienced in his personal life. Berio embodies this view of Mahler in the central movement of his *Sinfonia* of 1968. He quotes the 3rd Movement of the 2nd Symphony in its entirety, using it as a palimpsest on which a host of musical quotations from the 20th century and earlier are superimposed and are shown to be related. Mahler is revealed as the inheritor of the tradition of Bach, Beethoven and Berlioz and the progenitor of Schoenberg, Stravinsky, Debussy, Ravel, Hindemith and the later generation that included himself.

I rest my case.

Book Review
Bernstein, Lawrence F: Inside Mahler's Second Symphony: A Listener's Guide, OUP, 2022, 266pp.

It is either the fate or the privilege of Mahlerians that we will encounter Mahler's 2nd Symphony more frequently than any other. I may be challenged on this but as a normative statement I believe this to be true. It therefore behoves us to have a good book on the subject. This is it. Written by an Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Pennsylvania, this book is authoritative and readable at various levels. By that I mean that it is written in a manner such that for those whose technical musical knowledge is limited the book is illuminating and educating and for those who wish to approach the Symphony at a more musicological level, it is all there.

In the section on How to Use this Book the author states that this guide is not a book that can be profitably read from start to finish in one continuous pass. That is absolutely correct. It is eminently suitable as a resource for a multi-session workshop or for someone who has the time and inclination to study the 2nd at a leisurely pace over a number of weeks or even months. There is an easy to use indexing system which relates to a website recording of Bruno Walter and the New York Philharmonic (1958). The author defends his choice and predictably takes a few pages to do so! He has a full section dealing with Walter's discovery during that recording of the magnificent contralto voice of Maureen Forrester. It is suggested that the music be listened to on a laptop which does not make for easy reading; I rather used an iPhone perched on my armchair and accessed the relevant tracks quite quickly while simultaneously reading the text.

Sadly, the average Mahlerian is unlikely to undertake a prolonged study of the 2nd, or any other symphony for that matter, but I nevertheless found I could still obtain significant benefit from a three-hour cursory read and was also able to plant markers for parts of the book I might read in more depth in anticipation of going to a concert, or analysing aspects of a concert afterwards.

Without going into great technical depth, but for those who wish to and have the musical knowledge, that level of detail is there; the book provides a well-balanced guide to the musical structure of the work as well as a great deal that is interesting as to the source of some of the musical influences on each of the Movements, e.g. the influence of the compositions of the tragically short-lived Mahler contemporary Hans Rott, on the Trio.

Simon Rattle, Gilbert Kaplan, the author Henri de la Grange, and so many other famous and less famous people have had moments of revelation on hearing the 2nd early in their lives, with consequent impacts on the direction of their lives or, at minimum, their musical interests. There is a chapter on Mahler's life prior to his composition and, perhaps more interestingly, the atmosphere in Leipzig where he arrived as a young conductor on the eve of his composing the 2nd. The Berlin premiere is described in some detail: disliked by all the critics but greeted with great enthusiasm by younger members of the audience, some of whom were reported as having fallen over each other with emotion!

The core of the Symphony, with an appropriate level of attention in the book, is the pair of vocal movements. Be it for the first or the twentieth time, *O Röschen Röt* never fails to pluck at our heart strings; and the moment when the choir rises for the Klopstock Chorale, which Mahler first heard at the funeral of the conductor Hans von Bulow, proclaiming *Auferstehn* which does not mean "stand up" but, rather, "rise up" operates in a resurrective sense, hence the *Resurrection* Symphony. Here we recognise one of the great moments in all symphonic music.

Then we get into a deeper examination of Mahler as a composer, musician, maybe even as a poet/philosopher, since the last stanzas of the *Auferstehen* Chorale were written by Mahler himself, something I had not realised before. The only words in all of Mahler's music that he himself wrote, inspiring and moving.

This is the part of the book that I found distracting and presumptuous. The author gets deep into eschatology. A literal interpretation of the words of the *Auferstehen* chorale implies the resurrection of the dead. That then leads the author into a treatise on different Judaic and Christian concepts of Doomsday and the Resurrection of the Dead. The author is a musicologist not a theologian!

And thereafter he goes into the dangerous area that so many Mahler authors simply cannot resist. Their viewpoints on Mahler's religious outlook and its influences on his music, always expressed with conviction. Definitive. How many more times must we hear that as a young boy Mahler would surely have heard cantorial chants in the Synagogue at Iglau which doubtless had influence on his music, as did military music? As did folk music! As did the sounds of nature! For did not Mahler state that a symphony must be like the world!

We know absolutely nothing on Mahler's view of religion. I have yet to see a single statement ascribed to Mahler as to his religious belief. Hence, is it quite possible that the entire resurrection concept of the 2nd is metaphorical rather than strictly theological? It does, however, display a deeply spiritual side of Mahler and possibly his belief in God, with optimism eternal and boundless. Remember what we can say definitively about Mahler. He was pragmatic, he was opportunist, he was well read, he engaged in pursuits unusual for his time such as swimming and cycling. He did not write music out of religious conviction the way Bach or Bruckner did. But he was moved by nature and by the human spirit.

So, putting aside what I consider to be the author's unsubstantiated ascription of a definitive theological angle to the 2nd, and his wandering off into some areas of theology outside his area of expertise, this is a book both interesting and useful and will add significantly to one's understanding of a work which has both inspired and enthralled us since the first time we heard it. Make place for it on your crowded Mahler bookshelf! - Leslie Bergman.

Review

Mahler:

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, "Resurrection", Boulder Chorale, Colorado Mahlerfest Orchestra, Kenneth Woods (Conductor), Macky Auditorium.

The performance of Mahler's 2nd at the University of Colorado Campus was the closing event of the 36th Colorado Mahlerfest. The Festival presented a series of concerts, Festival-artist recitals, a symposium featuring talks by performers and scholars, and social events where audience members from around the country and world interacted with musicians and each other. Maestro Kenneth Woods, who has led the Mahlerfest since 2015, was conductor, solo cellist and speaker during the Festival. In addition to the 2nd, Woods led a concert of Mahler orchestral songs the night before, and a performance of Richard Wagner's *Die Walkure* Act 1 and Hans Gal's 4th Symphony, that opened the Festival. In each work, Woods demonstrated a mastery of material and programming. He has expanded the scope of the Festival by featuring works both influenced by and contemporary with Mahler, such as Hans Gal, Egon Wellesz, Erich Wolfgang Korngold, Erwin Schulhoff, Ernest Bloch and Thea Musgrave whose 1997 *Phoenix Rising* opened Sunday's concert. From the concert's first moments, the symbiotic relationship between orchestral players, solo singers, chorus and Music Director Woods was on display. These were inspired and searching performances of the afternoon's two works. Maestro Woods was in full command of the unfolding and pulse of Mahler's work, bringing expectation and excitement to the listener from the first moment to the last. Woods' authoritative interpretation, along with the virtuosity of the sections and soloists of the orchestra, created a magical, intimate and unforgettable experience for both audience members and musicians. The virtuoso singers of the Boulder Chorale blended perfectly with the orchestra and soloists in the heavenly final minutes of the work. Memories of the Sunday performances and Festival week will never fade. - David Woodward.

The Universal Mahlerian Message

GARY BALDWIN *concludes his thoughts on Mahler and Beethoven*

As listeners, Mahler may become too much for us to grasp and hold onto. Many give up in exhaustion and don't return. Who, some will ask, needs to have even more tension in their lives in the 21st Century? The tension from the stage is not the same as the tension in our lives. It is a musical metaphor for the communication of that tension. It exists as a musical expression that has no actual physical toll on the human being who is absorbing the sounds. It activates the brain and reminds us of the actual tension that we may have experienced. As always, that experience is personal and unlike those around us. There are those who will block it out while others embrace the experience because they know that it cannot hurt them.

There is Peace. As the clouds of death, disruption and tension part, Mahler gives us peace! It is always a surprise, and it is often fleeting. Mahler now gives us a break from what has been a turbulent journey. But if you know your Mahlerian Aesthetic you know it will be short-lived. It is just a chance to take a breath before he plunges back into the negative. When Mahler begins to get happy, beware that the opposite will occur. This is a reflection of the man's moods and behaviours, and the way his genius mind flowed. He would walk into one room in a particular mood and then when he reached another room he was a different person. A difficult man to know, to work with, to love. He vacillated in his music as a reflection of his own behaviour. It was difficult for his brain to find peace and, likewise, it was difficult for him to articulate peace in his music. When it does come it is like the opening of heaven's gate, brightly lit and radiant.

There is the Journey! For Mahler each of his symphonies is a world and a journey reflecting his life in all of its aspects. On a grander scale, the Mahlerian Journey begins with his early cantata *Das Klagende Lied* and culminates in his 10th Symphony. This is the journey of a lifetime where the symphonies are all connected. That journey has to be taken completely if we are going to be able to understand Mahler and count ourselves as true believers of the Mahlerian message. The investment is huge but the rewards are great! At risk is the death of our humanity!

This is also true of all great art and its function within society.

There is Love! We find it in all of Mahler's works, nestled in-between the jagged and thorny edges of war and death! This, of course, is where we have always found it before. The uniqueness and precious qualities of it shine like little diamonds in Mahler's 'polyphony of life'. When it arrives, it seems so pure and true we wonder if we have been transported back to Mozart! Even in Mahler's hyper-expressivity of love we sense that it comes with burning edges and almost untouchable reality. This is the very nature of his expression that here, in the 21st Century, we can relate to. So much of our love, past and present, and into the future, is framed by the realities that we live in. Joy flares within the horror. Love flares within the ravages of our daily lives. Mahler speaks to us in these terms.

There is Redemption! There is the Great Divide! Having travelled through Mahler's journey of death, disruption, tension, peace and love, we have progressed from nature-endowed valleys through the arduous climb up the mountains to the panoramic view of what lies below and what lies ahead.

As we look out, we realise that there is nowhere for us to go. At this moment, as we ponder the abyss, we have been given two solutions. When we take that next step into the unknown, we will find solid ground beneath our feet or we will be taught to fly. Mahler wishes us to fly! His answer to life is in redemption! He does not specify the exact resting-point because he himself did not know. If you are not a true Mahlerian, you tend to mistrust Mahler's answer and back away from him. You look for your answer somewhere else. There are other answers that have been given to us by other great artists and by great religions. They do not necessarily have to be contrary to Mahler's Vision. They can be compatible. The survival of humanity on the planet depends on it. In this discussion I have not analysed in musical theory how Mahler reaches his goal.

That is another completely different discussion, a far more complex arena of investigation that would require volumes and which will continue to be discussed for another one hundred years. The metaphor of flying takes a broader significance when one realises that man landed on the moon only 58 years after Mahler died in Vienna. The exponential growth of technology over those years has not been matched by humanity's spiritual needs. This is why we need Mahler now more than ever. He is not the only way of finding the path of redemption. Da Vinci also wanted to fly. How many years has that been? He, like so many gifted individuals, searched for some of the answers that Mahler has tried to provide.

Universalism! We can safely say that as a global identity Beethoven has reached a universality that cannot be denied. We know this because if we were to stop a youngster on the streets of Mumbai and ask him to identify the four-note motif that drops a minor third down from the opening of the 5th Symphony he would say Beethoven with great enthusiasm! It is true that people may not know anything more. Beethoven also gave us the victory over the oppressed with his 5th Symphony and the pathos of the Andante from the 7th Symphony and the bridge to universal brotherhood in the 9th.

When we are able to ask young people in Austria if they can identify the triplet figures that ascend up a minor third from the 5th Symphony and they say enthusiastically "Mahler" we may be on our way to a universality that matches Beethoven.

At the present time there seems to be as much Mahler on concert stages as Beethoven. Someone knows something about something! Mahler has built the bridges that follow Beethoven. Now it is our time to embrace Mahler and give him the same accord!

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To Live for You, to Die for You

In the fifth part of his survey of the Mahler relationship

ANTHONY CANTLE focuses on their marriage

Mahler's insistence on a reply to what amounted to an ultimatum took place before Christmas 1901. Alma replied and, as with weaker and more pliable individuals in search of and dependent upon their strong objects, she wrote promising what he wanted her to promise. No doubt hugely relieved with her response, Mahler replied: "I bless you, my beloved, my life, on this day, the children's day, in whom the seed of earthly as well as divine love strikes root wherever the seed falls. May my life be a blessing to yours."

The one healthy seed that seemed to survive after giving Mahler her promise, and in my view one which was later to grow to an oak tree of toxic proportion, was mirrored in her diary entry that Christmas: "And I have kept my word and yet, somewhere in me a wound kept smarting." Had Mahler fallen in love with Alma? Yes. Did he entertain hopes for companionship and children? Again yes. However, therapists know all too well the pitfalls of over-valuing the declaration by the couple of only loving feelings when a parallel dimension can seek to envy, negate, undermine and spoil. In his elegant tribute to the work of the late James Fisher, Brett Kahr refers to the importance Fisher attached to therapists interpreting the cruelty of couples. I believe Alma and Gustav Mahler could be mutually cruel and neglectful.

For all couples the quite usual experience of enduring and managing negative feelings will see the regular use of accusation and blame as natural devices for maintaining the thermostatic function of regulating resentment. My own view is that given Mahler's stipulations, which these days we would consider a form of abuse, this would have seen Alma from day one of their marriage having to control her aggression and hurt.

I believe this involved her adopting a titrated approach towards Mahler whereby she defended against disappointment and explicit fury by operating a quite conscious policy of managed resentment, one that was to characterise her attitude and expectations for the duration of the marriage up until the time of her affair ten years later in 1910. Alma's diary powerfully reflects her state of mind and the challenge of maintaining her own psychic equilibrium: "I existed only as his shadow. I lived his life. I had none of my own. Work, exaltation, self-denial and the never-ending quest were his whole life. I cancelled my will and my being: like a tightrope walker, I was concerned only with keeping my balance. He noticed nothing of all it cost me. He was utterly self-centred by nature, and yet he never thought of himself. His work was everything. I separated myself inwardly from him, though with reverence, and waited for a miracle. I was blind. In spite of having children, I was still a girl. He saw in me only the comrade, the mother and housewife, and was to learn too late what he had lost. These carnivores of genius, who think they are vegetarians! I have found it so all my life. People speak of ethics, but they hardly practise them."

I believe it is important to remember that, ghastly though this injunction on Alma's creativity had been, Mahler was neither the first nor last husband or father to impose restrictions on their spouse or daughter. As previously stated, Alma's own mother's career was a short one as Schindler needed to be the artist in the family.

There are other examples. Fanny Mendelssohn was barred from composing by her father who believed a public career was insufficient for a woman. When she reminded him that by the age of 14 she had learned all of Bach's *48 Preludes and Fugues* he is said to have replied "That's all very well, dear, but you're a girl, so you've got to stay at home and make the lives of men better." Referring to her brother Felix, she was told: "Music will perhaps become his profession while for you it can and must be only an ornament."

The American composer and pianist Amy Beach who died twenty years before Alma's death was to experience a similar fate. Like Alma, she too had married at 18 to a prominent Boston surgeon twenty-four years older than herself. Her husband, Henry Beach, wasn't happy for her to perform in public. In a study of her life Nicole Robinson writes: "Henry had the pleasure of a talented and vivacious young wife who beautified his home." One can detect something mournful from the titles of Beach's own writings in two published papers in the journal Etude: *Music after Marriage and Motherhood* (1909); and *To the Girl who wants to compose* (1918).

Staying with composers and musicians, but this time with the Welsh pianist Morfydd Owen who had been the wife of the psychoanalyst Ernest Jones, writing in his autobiography about when he met Morfydd, Jones says: "A home needs a mistress and I was in the mood to find one." In 1917 they had married in a secret ceremony at Marylebone Registry Office. Informing Freud of the marriage Jones writes that his bride was: “Very pretty, intelligent, and musical and sang at her first and last public concert the week I captured her.”

There were quickly tensions in the marriage, as it seems Jones expected the woman who had composed some 250 scores to become a housewife and secretary. Morfydd Owen died following an appendectomy carried out in her husband's family home in Swansea and was buried without a death certificate.

Serious artistic rivalry has been thought to have characterised the marriage of the artists Jackson Pollock and Lee Krasner. Britton cites the example of Edward Hopper who shared a studio with his wife who was also an artist. To avoid intruding into each other's space and, presumably, to avoid the enactment of their mutual rivalry, they resorted to painting a broad white line across the floor of the studio which neither partner was permitted to cross.

When reflecting on her decision to end performing, the late American soprano, Jo Sullivan Loesser, described her husband Frank as "the real star of the family though I still had the longing to perform (but) it wasn't appropriate because Frank didn't want to come home at night to an empty house."

When it came to his daughter Anna, Freud himself wasn't above patriarchal control. Sensing Ernest Jones' sexual interest in Anna, shortly before her departure to the UK in the autumn of 1914 when she would have been nineteen, Freud advised Jones: "She does not claim to be treated as a woman, being still far away from sexual longings and rather refusing men. There is an outspoken understanding between me and her that she should not consider marriage or the preliminaries before she gets 2 or 3 years older." It is worthy of note that the Freud that Gustav Mahler was to consult later shared in some respects a similar possessiveness when it came to spousal demands. Prior to his marriage to Martha Bernays he had demanded that she relinquish her attachment to her family and their Jewish traditions. Like Mahler, Freud had stated his unequivocal position by letter: "If you can't be fond enough of me to renounce for my sake your family, then you must lose me, wreck my life, and not get much yourself out of your family."

Coming closer to home, within the contemporary world of psychoanalytic psychotherapy, we find many examples of husbands and wives working as clinicians, teachers and authors. Who knows the extent to which within these relationships respect and recognition for each other's work is always fairly shared and safeguarded? My point in widening the net beyond the Mahler marriage is simply to acknowledge the ubiquitous nature of the inequality found between many creative couples and where, in the main though I cannot say exclusively, prioritising men's activities and achievements still appears very common.

In June 1910, Alma had sought physical and psychological replenishment at a health spa and had been accompanied there by her surviving daughter Anna and her governess. During her weeks at the spa Alma was to meet the 27-year-old architect Walter Gropius who had something of a reputation for pursuing other men's wives while perversely finding gratification in maintaining a semblance of respectful interest in the cuckolded husband. An intense affair started with Gropius that was quickly to trigger a very serious personal crisis for Mahler and involve a period of enormous turbulence for the couple, significantly involving Alma's mother as she straddled both duplicity and loyalty, repeating, as the event did, the same conflict she had experienced in her own affairs when married to Alma’s father.

When Alma returned from the spa to resume life with Mahler she had given Gropius explicitly clear instructions for maximum discretion so that he was to ensure his letters that summer were addressed to her at a local post office for her personal collection. Instead, Gropius wrote Alma a highly compromising letter incorporating “has your husband noticed anything yet" that he then addressed to Herr Direktor Mahler. Without necessarily being familiar with Freud's theory of Parapraxis, Alma was to say in her memoirs: "I was never to find out whether the youth had gone mad or had subconsciously wanted the letter opened by Mahler himself." Suffice it to say, it was the older man that went mad. Alma's account of the occasion was: "Mahler read it sitting at the piano. 'What's this?' he cried in a choked voice and handed me the letter. He was, and remained, convinced that my admirer had addressed it to him on purpose 'to ask me for your hand', as he put it."

Alma reports on the subsequent conversation with Mahler during the crisis: "Now I was able to tell him all. I told him I had longed for his love year after year and that he, in his fanatical concentration on his own life, had simply overlooked me. As I spoke, he felt for the first time that something was owed to the person with whom one's life has once been linked. He suddenly felt a sense of guilt." For Mahler to learn of Alma's infidelity and the humiliation of discovering the betrayal in the way he did understandably left him narcissistically wounded and very evidently distraught.

Klein wrote in 1913: "The truest mourning, however, for a beloved person whom one has lost and whom one knows to be happy in the arms of another man, is distorted by hatred, defiled with the blood of most deeply hurt vanity."

Mahler, however, seemed unable to make proper contact with his anger and hostility towards either Alma or Gropius, using it to reflect any more than Alma had been able a decade earlier to do the same when receiving Mahler's pre-marital demand that she cease all composing. In these circumstances separation and divorce might have been a considered option for other couples but not for Alma and Mahler. The adhesion underpinning their marital fit and Mahler's dread of abandonment meant that neither could ever face the loss of the other whatever the provocation or the justification.

Instead, Mahler took refuge in reading scripture and writing poems of adoration to Alma. Indeed, during this period and on learning from Alma that Gropius was actually staying in nearby Toblach, Mahler had gone and fetched Gropius and brought him back to the house.

Alma says of the meeting: "Night had fallen wordlessly ... they walked the long way, Mahler ahead carrying a lantern, the other following in the pitch darkness. I stayed in my room until Mahler came in, very serious, and asked me to see his rival. Reluctantly, I agreed to have a talk with him, but after a few brief minutes I broke it off in sudden fear for Mahler. I found him pacing the floor with a book in hand. Two candles burned on his desk. He was reading in Holy Scripture. 'Whatever you do', he said, 'will be well done. Choose'!'

Feeling so cruelly nominated for eviction from Alma's mind accelerated Mahler's near total collapse. My belief is that his misery swiftly morphed into a temporary but very severe breakdown. Alma's response was instantly to reassure Mahler that she would never leave him.

As clinicians know, reassurance seldom reassures. Mahler insisted that the doors of their adjacent bedrooms had to be left open during the night so he might hear her breathing.

Sometimes Alma would discover him standing by her bedside or lying on the floor of his lakeside composing hut wailing and weeping like a child crying for its mother. The poet Ursula Vaughan Williams succinctly captured a widow's grief after the death of Ralph Vaughan Williams when she wrote of "No Hand in the Night." From Alma's accounts of Mahler during this time his sense of abandonment was profound. The threat of losing her served to destabilise him and at one stage Alma feared he might take his life.

We know that, during this tumultuous period of intense anxiety for Mahler, Alma nevertheless continued to correspond with Gropius. Mahler's behaviour became increasingly erratic and alarming. His failure properly to mourn earlier lost siblings, his mother, and his first daughter, together with frustrations and obstructions in his professional life, often due to the prevailing anti-Semitism, all served to produce the magnified cascade effect so often seen in states of agitation and severe anxiety. All of this compounded Mahler's psychological fragility and the deterioration in his physical health.

It is believed that some aspects of their marriage and their pleasure in each other proved possible to retrieve. We also know that Mahler sought later to expiate his guilt and repair the hurt caused to Alma by his neglect of her compositions and to accord her own music the recognition it deserved. Alma describes how one day on nearing home from a walk she and Gucki (Anna) had been on, she heard from the house her songs being played and sung. She writes: "I stopped. I was petrified. My poor forgotten songs. I had dragged them to and fro to the country and back again for ten years, a weary load I could never get quit of. I was overwhelmed with shame and also I was angry; but Mahler came to meet me with such joy in his face that I could not say a word. 'What have I done!' he cried. 'These songs are good they're excellent. I insist on your working on them and we'll have them published. I shall never be happy until you start composing again. God, how blind and selfish I was in those days.' And he played them over and again and again."

Despite everything, Mahler was able to find the capacity and resources to prepare for performances in Munich of his 8th Symphony and to continue work on his 10th which, at the time of his death a year later, remained unfinished.

In other contributions to the Mahler story I have suggested that the First Movement of the 10th, composed during the harrowing time for Mahler of the marital crisis, unmistakably represents in music the extreme torment, anguish and utter despair that Mahler endured in reaction to Alma's affair with Gropius. At the foot of the manuscript, and using his pet name for Alma,, Mahler had written: "Fur dich leben! Fur dich sterben! - Almschki"

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My Mahler

From our December 2023 issue onwards, I plan to publish at least one article per issue under the general title of

"My Mahler".

What I am looking for are 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 Wayfarer house style. Editor.

The Gustav Mahler Society of the United Kingdom

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THE GUSTAV MAHLER SOCIETY UK

Please join us on 7 July 2023 at 6 pm

for the Gustav Mahler Society UK's AGM and Annual Birthday Dinner

at Brasserie Blanc, 9 Belvedere Road, South Bank, London SE1 8YP.

Order of Events

6 pm Welcome Drink

6.15 pm GMS UK AGM

6.45 pm Professor Jeremy Barham's talk 'Mahler on Screen'

7.30 pm Dinner followed by Birthday Toast and cutting of Birthday Cake

9.05 pm Raffle

£65 per head including 3-course meal, cake, prosecco and wine.

Please contact www.mahlersociety.org/events to confirm attendance and confirmation of payment to: Gustav Mahler Society UK;

Account No. 65078954; Sort 08-92-99 (Coop Bank Skelmersdale).

Please use the reference 'Din/your surname' to identify the payment.

Cheque to: GMS UK, 11 Whitelands Avenue, Chorleywood, Herts, WD3 5RE.

Brasserie Blanc will email menus to members in mid-June for online orders. Menus will be posted to members without emails whose choices should be forwarded to the above GMS UK address.

Jeremy Barham is Professor of Music and Director of the Institute of Austrian and German Music Research at the University of Surrey. His talk will explore the appeal of Mahler's music which has been 'enshrined' in films and advertising in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

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MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Dear Members, I am pleased that we are now running live events after the Covid-19 restrictions ended and thank you for your patience. Our Zoom events have been popular because of the Committee's careful selection of speakers. We are now aiming for a full range of events, so please check the website, Facebook and flyers regularly. The success of our Society depends on your support, and in my capacity as Membership Secretary, I do ask that all members ensure that their membership subscriptions have been renewed. The rates have not changed since 2022:
Single £25; Joint £30; Student £10. Click the link for membership/renewal:
How to join—The Gustav Mahler Society UK
Or use the information above for online or cheque payments.

With your continuing support and participation, we shall be assured a healthy and rewarding future for all our members. Anthony Raumann, Chairman.