DAYTON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA
2014-2025 SEASON

CLASSICAL CONNECTIONS PROGRAM 2

Mahler: The Visionary

Sunday, October 19, 2014, 3:00pm

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 4: Discussion and Demonstrations

from *The Youth's Magic Horn*: "The Earthly Life"

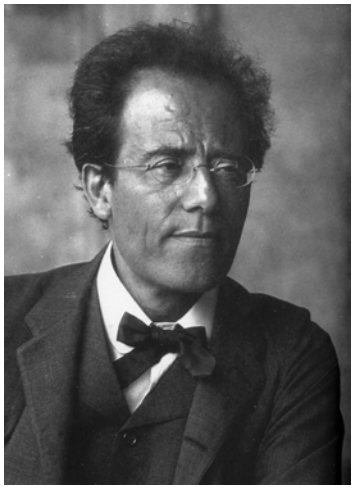
Mary Wilson, Soprano

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 4
Deliberate; Don't Rush
At a Leisurely Pace; Without Haste
Peaceful
"The Heavenly Life": Very Comfortable

Mary Wilson, Soprano

INTRODUCTION



Gustav Mahler is known for his massive symphonies. Symphony No. 3, composed between 1893 and 1896, is one of the longest symphonies of all time (one and three-quarters hours) for one of the largest orchestras ever (more than 100 players plus alto soloist, children's choir, and women's choir).

What did he do for an encore?

He wrote his shortest symphony (still long at just under an hour) for his smallest orchestra (no trombones, no tuba, no choirs).

Mahler Four stands alone among symphonies of the Romantic Era. Most romantic symphonies were modeled on Beethoven's Fifth: a journey from struggle to triumph—a continuous *crescendo*. This symphony reversed that model: a journey from unrest to quiet—a continuous *diminuendo*.

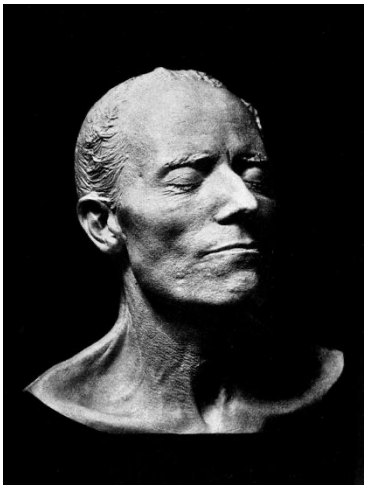
In addition to symphonies, Mahler loved writing songs. His favorite source for texts was *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Youth's Magic Horn*), a collection of folk poems published in 1805. Melodies from his *Wunderhorn* songs found their way into each of Mahler's first five symphonies. And the Fourth ends with a *Wunderhorn* song.

On this concert you'll hear not just the amazing musicians of your Dayton Philharmonic, but also the crystalline voice of soprano Mary Wilson.

Mary has been a frequent guest soloist with the Philharmonic and also with Dayton Opera. She has the perfect voice for "The Heavenly Life", the glorious song that closes Mahler's *Fourth* as well as for "The Earthly Life", the chilling *Wunderhorn* song that's the symphony's mysterious, dark companion.

The Mahler Revival

When he died in 1911, just shy of his 51st birthday, Gustav Mahler was the most famous musician alive. He had led and revitalized the Vienna State Opera. He had been Music Director of the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic. His funeral drew thousands of mourners to Vienna's Grinzing Cemetary.



Mahler's Death Mask

But Mahler's own music nearly died with him. Despite valiant efforts by conductors like Willem Mengelberg, Bruno Walter, John Barbirolli, and Dimitri Mitropolous, Mahler's symphonies and song cycles virtually disappeared from concert programs.
What happened?

Mahler died. He was his music's main interpreter and advocate. Both creator and conductor, he had a near monopoly on its performance. It took time for other conductors to add Mahler to their repertoire.

Times changed. Mahler was the end of a great line of Austro-German composers going back to Joseph Haydn. By the second decade of the 20th century, new musical styles were ascendant—Debussy, Ravel, Schoenberg, Stravinsky. Even Richard Strauss (who would later return to a more romantic musical language) was writing in an avant garde musical style. Mahler's music was too old-fashioned for modern tastes.

Politics intruded. World War One and its aftermath made Austro-German music (except for the long-dead classics) less popular. The rise of Hitler and World War Two hurt Mahler's legacy even more. He was too Jewish for the Nazis and too German for the Allies.

America was a problem, too. Classical music didn't become popular in the U.S. until the 1940s, when media mogul David Sarnoff brought Arturo Toscanini to New York to conduct the NBC Symphony Orchestra. Sarnoff promoted Toscanini—and classical music—through nationwide radio broadcasts. That was great for classical music. But bad for Mahler. Sarnoff's marketing hype told Americans that the only music worth listening to was the music Toscanini conducted. And Toscanini never conducted Mahler.

Then, after a 50-year lull, came the Mahler Revival of the 1960s.

Enter Lenny.

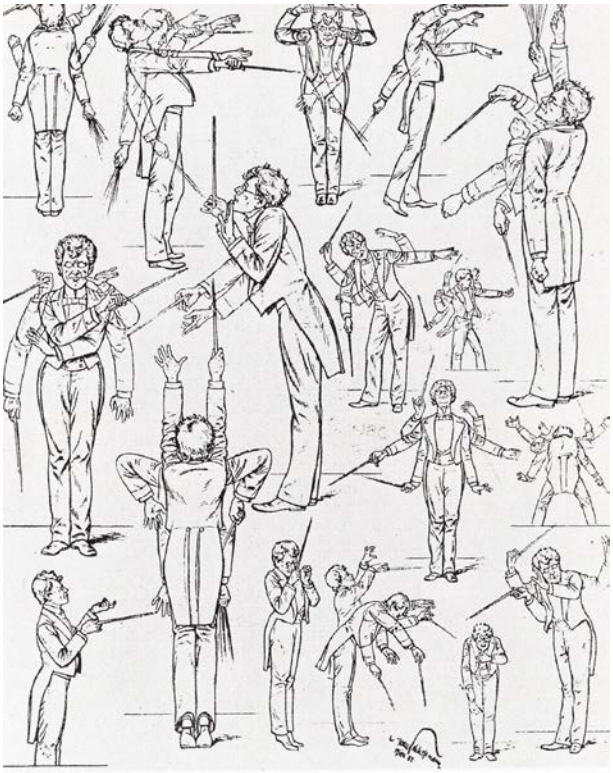
Leonard Bernstein was turned on to Mahler by his conducting mentors Artur Rodzinski and Dimitri Mitropolous. When Bernstein became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 1958, Mahler became a central part of the orchestra's repertoire.

Audiences resisted. Mahler's symphonies were unfamiliar. And long. But Lenny was Lenny—passionate, persuasive, persistent. Listeners gradually came around.

Lenny loved the music, but it wasn't just that. He felt a close personal affinity with Mahler. Here's an excerpt from the script of "Who is Gustav Mahler?", a televised Young People's Concert from 1960: "[T]here are some people, a lot of them, who say that Mahler may have been a fine conductor but he wasn't so hot as a composer. Some people say that Mahler's own music sounds too much like all the composers he used to conduct…and that he just remembered their music and imitated it when he wrote his own. They say that, anyway, a conductor's head is too full of everyone else's music, so how can he write original stuff of his own? Naturally I don't agree with these people at all… But still I admit it's a problem to be both a conductor and a composer; there never seems to be enough time and energy to be both things. I ought to know because I have the same problem myself, and that's one of the reasons why I'm so sympathetic to Mahler: I understand his problem. It's like being two different men locked up in the same body; one man is a conductor and the other a composer, and they're both one fellow called Mahler (or Bernstein)."

Bernstein Conducting Mahler's Second Symphony at Tanglewood

Lenny's active, extroverted, over-the-top demeanor on the podium was well-suited to Mahler's music, with its searing climaxes, sudden changes of mood, and juxtapositions of high and low musical styles. In fact, contemporary reports of Mahler's conducting make him sound a lot like Lenny on the podium! Even watching from behind, an audience could live the emotional rollercoaster of the music just by watching Bernstein's gestures. Check out Bernstein's concert videos on YouTube, and you'll see that his Mahler performances were even more gripping when viewed from the players' vantage.



A Vienna Newspaper's Caricature of Mahler's Conducting Style

Lenny's role in the Mahler Revival went beyond thrilling concert performances. His cycle of Mahler symphony recordings made with the New York Philharmonic from 1960 to 1967 may have been even more important. Later recordings with the Vienna Philharmonic and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra internationalized the Mahler movement.

The Dayton Philharmonic's Mahler history parallels the Mahler Revival. No performances of his music from the orchestra's founding in 1933 until Paul Katz conducted Symphony No. 1 in 1972. Then Mahler symphonies appear every year or so from 1976 until the present.

I wish we played Mahler every season. The orchestra loves playing the music. It's incredibly challenging, but incredibly rewarding. But audiences are still a little afraid—the symphonies *are* long. And budget hawks in the office are a little afraid, too—most Mahler symphonies call for lots of extra musicians, which means increased performance costs.

Long, expensive, whatever! Mahler's works are some of the most beautiful, most dramatic works ever written. They're the pinnacle of romantic orchestral music. They're light and dark, joy and sorrow, life and death.

If you weren't on the Mahler Revival bandwagon before this Classical Connections program, I hope you will be afterwards!

Do As I Say (Not As I Do)

In his 1981 book, *The Composer's Advocate*, the great maestro Erich Leinsdorf said that the conductor's job is represent the composer's interests, to make sure that the music is played as the composer intended.

Leinsdorf wrote the book. But it's Gustav Mahler's idea.

Erich Leinsdorf

Today we take the conductor's central role for granted. It wasn't always so. In Haydn's and Mozart's time, orchestras were led either by a keyboard player or by the concertmaster. Conductors became common in the early 19th century, and the modern-day notion of the conductor as time-keeper, shaper of interpretation, and focus of everyone's attention dates to the 1880s.

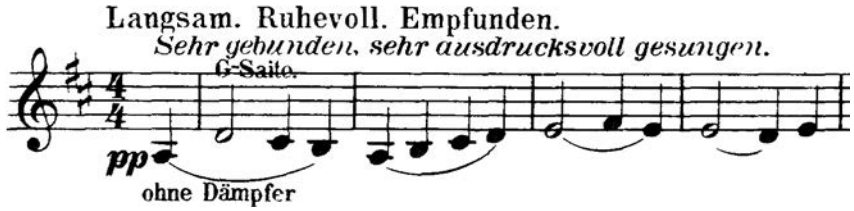
Gustav Mahler got his first conducting gig in 1880. He was the first modern conductor.

At the time, the state of musical performance in European orchestras was deplorable. Bad work habits. Sloppy playing. No reverence for the printed text. Mahler's goal was to instill good work habits, raise the level of playing, and inspire fidelity to the composer's intent. Above all, he wanted his musicians to look to the podium for guidance on every aspect of the music.

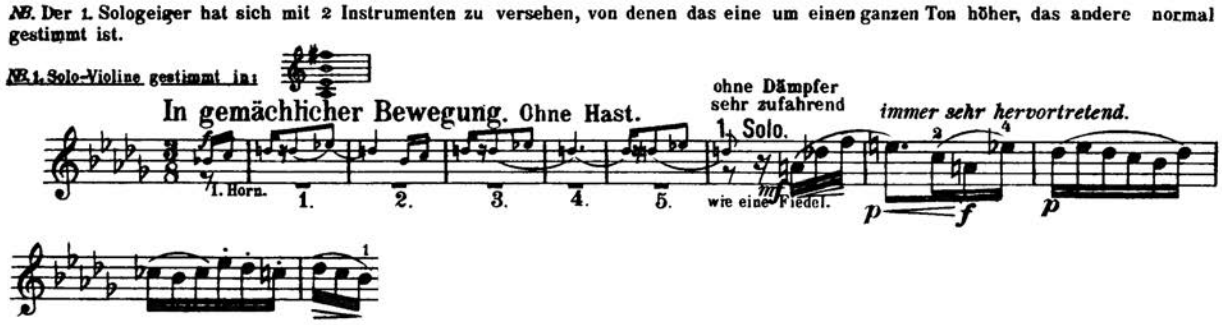
However, Mahler wasn't exactly a Leinsdorf-style composer's advocate. When conducting other people's music, Mahler wasn't shy about changing what they wrote. His personal score to Beethoven's Ninth is on view in the New York Philharmonic's wonderful online archive. It's *full* of changes and "improvements" to what Beethoven's text.

But Mahler was a stickler when it came to his own music. He knew just how sloppy performances could be. He knew exactly the kind of mistakes (and misinterpretations) that were likely. He knew the liberties that musicians—and other conductors—were likely to take.

So he filled his scores with meticulous instructions. In the first bar of the finale of the Third Symphony, Mahler tells the first violins: "slow; peaceful; sensitive; very smooth; very expressive; lyrical; on the G-string; very soft, without mute".



When Jessica Hung plays the first phrase of her solo in the scherzo of the Fourth Symphony, she has so many technical instructions that it's hard to see the notes!



Control freak? You bet!

But he knew what he wanted. And he wanted us to do it his way. It's my job—as the composer's advocate—to make sure that we do.

Gustav Mahler Timeline

1860	**July 7,** born in Kalischt, Bohemia to distiller and tavern owner Bernhard Mahler and Marie Hermann Mahler.	**1860**	Lincoln elected 16th U.S. President. South Carolina secedes. First British Open golf tournament. Internal combustion engine.
1866	Begins piano lessons. Gives first public recital.	**1866**	Alfred Nobel invents dynamite.
1875	Enters Vienna Conservatory, studying harmony and composition.	**1875**	*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. First swim of the English Channel.
1878	First major work, the cantata *Das Klagende Lied* (*The Mournful Song*).	**1878**	*H.M.S. Pinafore*. Microphone invented. Hardy's *The Return of the Native*.
1880	Named opera conductor in the spa town of Bad Hall, the first of many conducting posts	**1880**	*Ben Hur*. Edison invents the light bulb. First bingo game. Rodin sculpts *The Thinker*.
1884	Writes *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Starts First Symphony.	**1884**	Seurat's *Bathing at Asnières*. *Huckleberry Finn*.
1888	Begins setting poems from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.	**1888**	Tesla's first electric motor. First Kodak camera.
1892	*Wunderhorn s*ong "The Heavenly Life", later to become the finale of Symphony No. 4.	**1892**	Monet paints Rouen Cathedral (again and again). *Nutcracker* Ballet premieres in St. Petersburg.
1896	Completes Third Symphony, omitting "The Heavenly Life", originally intended as the finale.	**1896**	McKinley elected 25th U.S. President. First modern Olympics held in Athens.
1897	Converts from Judaism to Christianity. Named Artistic Director of Vienna State Opera.	**1897**	H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*. Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. *Cyrano de Bergerac*.
1900	Completes Fourth Symphony.	**1900**	First Davis Cup competition. Puccini's *Tosca*.
1907	A bad year. Four-year-old daughter dies. Heart disease diagnosis. Wife has an affair.	**1907**	Oklahoma becomes 46th state. Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Cubs win the World Series.
1909	Moves from Vienna to New York to lead the New York Philharmonic.	**1909**	Selfridge's department store opens. Peary reaches the North Pole. Taft inaugurated 27th U.S. President.
1911	**May 18,** dies in Vienna of endocarditis.	**1911**	Charles Kettering invents the electric starter.