

Thursday, November 8, 8pm  
Friday, November 9, 8pm;  
Saturday, November 10, 8pm  
JAMES LEVINE conducting

BERG VIOLIN CONCERTO  
Andante—Allegretto  
Allegro—Adagio  
CHRISTIAN TETZLAFF

{ intermission }

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 9  
Andante comodo  
Im Tempo eines gemächliches Ländlers.  
Etwas täppisch und sehr derb.  
[In the tempo of a comfortable Ländler.  
Somewhat clumsy and very coarse.]  
Rondo-Burleske. Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig. [Very defiant]  
Adagio

Tuesday, November 13, 8pm  
JAMES LEVINE conducting

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 9  
Andante comodo  
Im Tempo eines gemächliches Ländlers.  
Etwas täppisch und sehr derb.  
[In the tempo of a comfortable Ländler.  
Somewhat clumsy and very coarse.]  
Rondo-Burleske. Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig. [Very defiant]  
Adagio

Alban Berg  
Violin Concerto

ALBANO MARIA JOHANNES BERG WAS BORN ON FEBRUARY 9, 1885, IN VIENNA AND DIED THERE ON DECEMBER 24, 1935. HE WROTE THE VIOLIN CONCERTO, HIS LAST COMPLETE WORK, IN THE SPRING AND SUMMER OF 1935, FINISHING THE COMPOSITION ON JULY 15 AND COMPLETING THE ORCHESTRATION ON AUGUST 12. LOUIS KRASNER, WHO HAD COMMISSIONED THE CONCERTO FROM BERG, GAVE THE FIRST PERFORMANCE ON APRIL 19, 1936, IN BARCELONA, AT A FESTIVAL OF THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC; HERMANN SCHERCHEN CONDUCTED THE ORQUESTRA PAU CASALS. KRASNER, WHO MADE THE WORK KNOWN ALL OVER EUROPE AND AMERICA, ALSO INTRODUCED IT IN THE UNITED STATES, AT CONCERTS OF THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ON MARCH 5 AND 6, 1937, WITH SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY CONDUCTING.

IN ADDITION TO THE SOLO VIOLIN, THE SCORE CALLS FOR TWO FLUTES (BOTH DOUBLING PICCOLO), TWO OBOES (ONE DOUBLING ENGLISH HORN), THREE CLARINETS (THE THIRD DOUBLING ALTO SAXOPHONE) AND BASS CLARINET, TWO BASSOONS AND CONTRABASSOON, FOUR HORNS, TWO TRUMPETS, ONE TENOR AND ONE BASS TROMBONE, BASS TUBA, TIMPANI, BASS DRUM, CYMBALS, SNARE DRUM, TAM-TAM (LOW), GONG (HIGH), TRIANGLE, AND STRINGS.

On August 12, 1909, Alban Berg wrote to Helene Nahowski, whom he would marry two years later, that “this morning a wasp stung me in my right hand, middle finger. It began to swell and has now become so thick I can hardly move the fingers; quite painful. Well that’s life in the country.” In the next day’s letter he writes, evidently from experience, “My hand is not better yet, I ought really to keep it very quiet so that the inflammation won’t spread to the arm.” Twenty-six years later to the day, Berg drew the double bar on the last page of his Violin Concerto. Soon after, the wasps got to him again, and this time Berg, all his life a bundle of ailments, allergies, and hypochondriac fantasies, did not recover. Carbuncles developed, then boils, then an abscess on his back, and then blood poisoning. He received a transfusion—the donor was a Viennese laborer, and Berg expressed the hope that it would not turn him into an operetta composer—but, with sulfa drugs not yet available, nothing helped. On December 23 he said, “Today is the 23rd. It will be a decisive day.” Ever since his first attack of bronchial asthma on July 23, 1908—at age twenty-three—he had been superstitious about the number 23. Helene Berg sought to help her husband by moving the clocks ahead so as to convince him that the critical day was past. In vain: Berg survived the critical 23rd, but only by an hour and a quarter.

He was two days older than his adored Gustav Mahler had been at the time of his death. The score of his opera *Lulu*, a project he had harbored for thirty years, was nearly finished. The last completed work was the Violin Concerto for whose sake, and rather to his own surprise, he had interrupted work on *Lulu*. Two summonses had called the concerto into being. First, the Russian-born American violinist Louis Krasner (1903-1995) commissioned such a work from Berg. Krasner knew and liked the lyrical quality of Berg’s early Piano Sonata; then, in Vienna early in 1935, he had the opportunity to hear the Galimir Quartet play something more recent and representative, the *Lyric Suite* of 1925-26. Not only was Krasner impressed by the *Lyric Suite*, he also fell in love with, proposed to, and married Adrienne Galimir, the second violinist in the quartet, which then consisted of a brother and three sisters. Berg was reluctant to commit himself to the idea of a concerto, saying that the world of Wieniawski and Vieuxtemps was not his world, to which Krasner sensibly replied that after all Beethoven and Brahms had written violin concertos, too. Still more telling was Krasner’s suggestion that Berg was the man to demonstrate the lyric and expressive potential of twelve-tone music. For a while, Berg stuck to his rather guarded position, but he formally accepted the commission, and friends observed that he lately acquired the new and strange habit of attending violin recitals.

The second summons was a tragic one—the death on April 22, 1935, of Manon Gropius, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Alma Mahler-Werfel by her second husband, the architect Walter Gropius.\* Manon, singularly gifted, gentle, vivacious, and beautiful, seems to have been loved by everyone who came in contact with her. She was studying to be an actress when struck down by poliomyelitis, which led to spinal paralysis and so to her death. Berg, shaken through and through, suddenly saw how the concerto might be a Requiem for the beloved Manon. The title-page says at the top “Für Louis Krasner” and at the bottom, “Dem Andenken eines Engels” (“to the memory of an angel”). “Angel” carries a specific reference in that Max Reinhardt had planned to have Manon make her debut as an angel in his Salzburg production of *Everyman*.

In June, Krasner was able to spend some time with Berg at the composer’s country house on the Wörthersee—just opposite Pörschach, where Brahms had written his Violin Concerto, as he was fond of pointing out—and he spent hours improvising for him so that Berg might get to know the strengths and characteristics of his technique and style. Until then, Berg had been the slowest of the great composers, and his catalogue is very small. But the Violin Concerto poured out of him with a speed and urgency and ease he had never before experienced. On July 16 he was able to write to Krasner that he had finished the composition of “our” concerto the day before. “I am perhaps even more astonished than you,” he added. “I was, to be sure, industrious as never before in my life and must add that the work gave me more and more joy. I hope—no, I believe confidently—that I have succeeded.”

In 1935, Berg was just past the height of his fame and public success. He would have been at the zenith if the establishment in 1933 of Hitler’s regime had not suddenly choked off the performances in all the German theaters of his opera *Wozzeck*. Losing what had become a substantial source of royalties caused Berg serious financial hardship, and throughout 1934 and 1935 he was obliged seriously to consider selling his country house and the little Ford convertible he had proudly bought with *Wozzeck* earnings in the fall of 1930.

His father, whom he resembled to an uncanny degree, was a bookdealer who had come to Vienna from Nuremberg in 1867, and the whole family crackled with literary, theatrical, musical, and artistic talent. Berg’s sister, Smaragda, was the only other member of the family to pursue a professional career in music: she

became a superb, much sought-after vocal coach, among whose pupils was Frida Leider, the great Isolde and Brünnhilde of the pre-Flagstad era. Alban's and Smaragda's older brother, Hermann, who emigrated to the United States, where he joined the New York firm of importers, Geo. Borgfeldt & Co. Inc., was responsible for a creation perhaps even more significant than *Wozzeck*, *Lulu*, the *Lyric Suite*, and the Violin Concerto, and certainly one of wider circulation, for it was he who gave the world the teddy bear.

It was Smaragda who spotted a newspaper advertisement on October 8, 1904, announcing that Arnold Schoenberg would be teaching some night classes in harmony and counterpoint, and another brother, Karl, known as Charly, who secretly took some of Alban's songs to the already celebrated, indeed notorious Schoenberg for evaluation. Schoenberg accepted Berg as a pupil, and Berg studied with him in a nourishing, trying, often exceedingly dependent relationship until 1910. Those aspects of their friendship hardly changed over the years. For a time after his father's early death in 1900, Berg had had to support himself by means of a job in civil service, but an inheritance from an aunt made him modestly independent in 1906. In 1908 he completed his Piano Sonata, the first work to which he assigned an opus number and which he counted as the real beginning of his career as a composer. There followed a string quartet in 1910, Five Songs with orchestra on texts by Peter Altenberg in 1912, Three Pieces for Orchestra in 1913, and the completion in 1922 of *Wozzeck*, on which he had begun work in 1914. In 1911 Berg had married Helene Nahowski and moved into the apartment he was to occupy for the rest of his life, and which was still Helene Berg's home when she died in 1976. Berg served briefly in the army, wrote some criticism and analysis, and after the war assisted Schoenberg in setting up the Society for Private Musical Performances in Vienna. *Wozzeck* was the turning point. The performance under Hermann Scherchen in Frankfurt of concert excerpts in July 1924 made his name widely known. The first complete production followed in Berlin under Erich Kleiber's direction in December 1925. Still more significant was the production in March 1929 in Oldenburg, then a city of some 400,000. It made the point that *Wozzeck* was not just something for the big houses, and within a few years, Berg's opera was in the repertory of some thirty European theaters. In March 1931, Leopold Stokowski introduced *Wozzeck* in Philadelphia and New York.

Meanwhile, Berg led his life, traveled to hear performances of his music, carried on a copious correspondence, read voraciously (Balzac, Strindberg, Ibsen, Kafka, Karl Kraus, Shakespeare, Goethe, Thomas Mann, Robert Musil were special favorites, but there was also room for Jack London and the Styrian poet, Peter Rosegger), played with his albino dachshunds, laughed at the movies of Buster Keaton and of Laurel and Hardy, cheered himself hoarse at soccer games, was delighted to receive a visit from George Gershwin, and wished in vain that the Austrian government's tobacco monopoly, which had called its more luxurious grade of cigarette "Heliane" after an opera by Erich Wolfgang Korngold, would name its cheapest working-class brand "Wozzeck." Honors began to come his way, but when the City of Vienna offered him the honorary title of Professor (and that is a big deal in Austria and Germany to this day), he turned it down: "Too late," he said, "Alban Berg is quite enough." He himself became a teacher. His most famous pupil was that formidable polymath, Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, who eventually wrote a brilliant and characteristically idiosyncratic study of his master. On the other hand, the parents of an extraordinarily gifted English boy refused, on the advice of his teacher, to allow him to go to Berg, for it was feared he would be a bad influence: Benjamin Britten never got over his chagrin.

Of course the most important thing was Berg's music. He spent as much time as he could in the country house where he could concentrate so well and which, with typical black humor, he called his concentration camp. (During his final illness he commended the choice of the Rudolf Hospital for its convenience on the grounds that it was already halfway to the Central Cemetery.) At any rate, he added to his catalogue the Chamber Concerto for violin, piano, and thirteen wind instruments, the *Lyric Suite* for string quartet, the concert aria *Der Wein* on a poem by Baudelaire, most of *Lulu*, and the Violin Concerto. Twelve days before his death, wracked by fever, he was able for the first time to attend one of the many performances of the five-movement Symphony he had drawn from *Lulu*: it was the last music he heard. The Violin Concerto he never heard at all. After Berg's death, the program committee of the International Society of Contemporary Music, an organization on whose juries Berg had repeatedly served, asked Krasner to play the concerto at the festival scheduled for Barcelona in April 1936. Schoenberg's most famous pupil, Anton Webern, was to conduct, but, emotionally upset, unable to get along linguistically or in any other way with the Catalan orchestra, allowing himself to become hopelessly bogged down in detail, he withdrew at the last moment, and

Hermann Scherchen, with minimal chance to study the score and of course with next to no rehearsal time available, came to the last-minute and heroic rescue.

Berg casts his concerto in two movements, each divided into two parts. The music starts in utmost quiet as harp and clarinets with solo violin begin some exploratory prelude, gently drifting at first—the violin's entrance is just a touching of the four open strings from G up to E and down again—but gradually taking on a firmer sense of direction. A clear cadence is reached and, with a simple accompanying figure to set the pace, the first movement proper begins. When the violin next enters, it again begins on the open G-string, but moves up this time into a higher register. Virtually every choice of pitch that Berg makes in the concerto is related to this particular ordering of the twelve notes of our chromatic scale. The ones to which the four strings of a violin are tuned, each bearing either a minor or a major chord, they are the scaffolding of Berg's chosen series. The last four notes take on special meaning later. It is clear from the outset that both a place for traditional tonal harmonies and a specifically violinistic element are built right into the material.

The two movements of the concerto can be said to represent respectively a portrait of Manon Gropius and a drama of "death and transfiguration." The Andante, which Berg thought of as a Praeludium, soon leads to a wistful Allegretto. This is music full of pictorial reference: the sweet thirds in the violin are to be played "*wienerisch*" ("Viennese"), a more bumpkin-like passage is to be "*rustico*," and the hiccup of the yodel is heard. There is even room for quotation when, after a couple of contrasting episodes (Trios to this scherzo, really), a Carinthian folk song is tenderly passed among the horn, the solo violin, and two trumpets:\*

The second movement enters violently and with an intensity of dissonance Berg has so far avoided. Berg sets up a powerful contrast between the cadenza-like freedom with which he wishes the opening projected and the strictly rhythmic style that takes over later on. A dotted rhythm ominously commands this scene. A demanding cadenza halts the forward thrust for a moment, but when the orchestra re-enters in full force, it pushes the music toward an immense climax. The storm subsides, and the violin is heard quietly but decisively playing a Bach chorale, accompanied only by the bassoon and a few of the orchestral strings. At a point when the first movement was far advanced and the basic compositional material of the concerto was long since determined, Berg was still looking for a suitable Bach chorale that he might somehow introduce. When he found one, it was so right he could hardly believe it: not only was the text perfect, but its first four notes were the last four of his own ordering of the twelve notes. It is, moreover, Bach's most adventurous, chromatic, tension-laden chorale harmonization, so that it fits uncannily with Berg's own harmonic style. It comes from the Cantata No. 60, *O Ewigkeit, du Donnerwort* (*O Eternity, Thou Word of Thunder*), and the melody itself is by the 17th-century Mühlhausen church musician, Johann Rudolf Ahle. The words, by Franz Joachim Burmeister (1633-72), are as follows:

Es ist genug!  
Herr, wenn es dir gefällt,  
So spanne mich doch aus!  
Mein Jesus kommt:  
Nun gute Nacht, o Welt!  
Ich fahr' ins Himmelhaus,  
Ich fahre sicher hin mit Frieden,  
Mein grosser Jammer bleibt darnieden.  
Es ist genug! Es ist genug!

It is enough!  
Lord, if it please you,  
Unyoke me now at last!  
My Jesus comes:  
Now good night, o world!  
I travel to my heavenly home,  
I travel surely and in peace,  
My great distress remains below.  
It is enough! It is enough!

Berg's and Bach's harmonizations alternate and subtly intersect. Variations follow the playing through of the hymn, beginning with the melody in muted cellos and harp. The solo violin, also muted, joins in and is in turn joined by a single violin from the orchestra, then another, and more and more. Berg even asks that at this point the violinist "audibly *and visibly*" assume leadership of the strings. Louis Krasner stated that to Berg, this was "the real cadenza" of the concerto, and that he thought of the passage as one in which one seemed to perceive the solo through an ever-stronger magnifying glass until one violin, grown to overwhelming dimensions, entirely fills the room. The other strings drop away as gradually as they had entered until only the soloist is left. The Carinthian song is heard as if from a great distance, but it is the chorale, garlanded about with a filigree of solo strings, that leads the work to its serene close: "My great distress remains below." The last music we hear is a scarcely audible recollection of the prelude on open strings where it all began.

Michael Steinberg

MICHAEL STEINBERG was the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Director of Publications from 1976 to 1979, having previously been music critic of the Boston Globe from 1964 to 1976. After leaving Boston he was program annotator for the San Francisco Symphony and then also for the New York Philharmonic. Oxford University Press has published three compilations of his program notes: "The Symphony—A Listener's Guide," "The Concerto—A Listener's Guide," and "Choral Masterworks—A Listener's Guide." Essays by Mr. Steinberg on a variety of musical subjects also appear in "For the Love of Music—Invitations to Listening," also from Oxford University Press.

\* Alma Mahler was by then married to the novelist Franz Werfel. In the mid-1970s, research by George Perle and Douglass Green uncovered a long and passionate love affair between Berg and Werfel's sister, Hanna Fuchs-Robettin. Berg's *Lyric Suite*, it turns out, was secretly dedicated to Hanna and is full of references and messages to her that are encoded in various musical and structural features of the work.

\*Carinthia is a province in the southwest of Austria. It was there that Berg composed the concerto. Its German name is Kärnten, and the Kärntnerthor Theater in Vienna that one encounters so often in writings about Mozart and Beethoven was by the city gate where one took the road for Carinthia.

the first american performances—which were also the first boston symphony performances—of Berg's Violin Concerto were played by Louis Krasner with Serge Koussevitzky conducting on March 5 and 6, 1937. (It was Krasner who had commissioned the work, and who gave the world premiere in April 1936; see page 45.) The concerto has also been performed in Boston Symphony concerts featuring Isaac Stern (Charles Munch conducting), George Zazofsky (Erich Leinsdorf conducting), Arthur Grumiaux (Leinsdorf), Itzhak Perlman (Seiji Ozawa, a recording also being made at that time—November 1978—for Deutsche Grammophon), Christian Tetzlaff (Roger Norrington), Frank Peter Zimmermann (Bernard Haitink), and Gil Shaham (the most recent subscription performances, with Antonio Pappano, in January 2004).

### Gustav Mahler Symphony No. 9

GUSTAV MAHLER WAS BORN IN KALISCHE (KALISTE) NEAR THE MORAVIAN BORDER OF BOHEMIA ON JULY 7, 1860, AND DIED IN VIENNA ON MAY 18, 1911. HE BEGAN HIS NINTH SYMPHONY IN THE LATE SPRING OF 1909, FINISHED THE ORCHESTRAL DRAFT THAT FALL, AND, ON APRIL 1, 1910, WAS ABLE TO REPORT TO HIS FRIEND AND FORMER ASSISTANT BRUNO WALTER THAT THE SCORE, "A VERY POSITIVE ENRICHMENT OF MY LITTLE FAMILY," WAS COMPLETE. IT WAS WALTER WHO CONDUCTED THE FIRST PERFORMANCE, ON JUNE 26, 1912, WITH THE VIENNA PHILHARMONIC. THE FIRST UNITED STATES PERFORMANCES WERE GIVEN BY THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, SERGE KOUSSEVITZKY CONDUCTING, ON OCTOBER 16 AND 17, 1931.

THE SCORE CALLS FOR FOUR FLUTES AND PICCOLO, THREE OBOES AND ENGLISH HORN, FOUR CLARINETS (FOURTH DOUBLING E-FLAT CLARINET) AND BASS CLARINET, FOUR BASSOONS (THIRD DOUBLING CONTRABASSOON), FOUR HORNS, THREE TRUMPETS, THREE TROMBONES, BASS TUBA, TIMPANI, CYMBALS, BASS DRUM, TAM-TAM, TRIANGLE, GLOCKENSPIEL, LOW-PITCHED CHIMES, TWO HARPS, AND STRINGS. (MAHLER'S AUTOGRAPH HAS ONLY A SINGLE HARP; THE DECISION TO DIVIDE THE PART BETWEEN TWO PLAYERS WAS BRUNO WALTER'S.)

The Ninth Symphony is the last score Mahler completed. Some dark part of him would have wanted it so, for, with Beethoven's Ninth and Bruckner's unfinished Ninth in mind, he entertained a deep-rooted superstition about symphonies and the number nine. He had even tried to deceive the counting gods by calling *Das Lied von der Erde* (*The Song of the Earth*), the work that followed the Eighth Symphony, "a symphony for contralto (or baritone), tenor, and orchestra," but not giving it a number. *Das Lied von der Erde* is,

therefore, a secret Ninth Symphony, while the official Ninth is “really” the Tenth. But there was also the side to Mahler that caused him, for all his fascination with death, always to choose life. That was the Mahler who was more interested in writing music than in flirting with his superstitions or his penchant for morbid fancy. That was also the Mahler who, within days of completing the Ninth Symphony, plunged with tempestuous energy into the task of composing a Tenth, a task on which he had made significant progress when he died of a streptococcal blood infection seven weeks before his fifty-first birthday.

The Ninth was also the last of Mahler’s completed scores to be presented to the public, something that has surely contributed to the tradition of reading the work as the composer’s farewell to life. The gestures of dissolution and parting with which this symphony ends are of an annihilating poignancy matched not even by Mahler himself. Nonetheless, it is well to understand that Mahler cannot have meant this as an actual farewell. To insist on reading it thus is to indulge in a sentimentality that weakens the stab of this music. Mahler’s symphonies fall into groups whose members share points of view and even material details, each piece being more richly understood in the context of its group. The Second, Third, and Fourth symphonies, for example, are all tied to Mahler’s love for and work on the Romantic anthology of folk poetry called *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Boy’s Magic Horn*). The Ninth is part of a trilogy that begins with *Das Lied von der Erde* and leads to the unfinished Symphony No. 10. It is in some respects commentary upon and extension of the song-symphony, while the Tenth both quotes *Das Lied von der Erde* and further explores certain ideas and features of the Ninth.

Mahler wrote the Ninth Symphony in the midst of the whirlwind that was the last chapter of his not very long life. That chapter began in 1907. Four momentous things happened that year. On March 17, Mahler resigned the Artistic Directorship of the Vienna Court Opera, bringing to a close a ten-year term whose achievement has become legend. Mahler was, however, drained by the struggles and tempests that were the price of that achievement, worn down by anti-Semitic attacks on himself and his young protégé Bruno Walter, and feeling the need to give more time to the composition and performance of his own music. He was not, however, able either to resist the lure of the podium nor to do without his income as a conductor, and on June 5, he signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he would make his debut conducting *Tristan und Isolde* on New Year’s Day 1908.

On July 5, his daughter Maria, four-and-a-half, died at the end of a two-week battle with scarlet fever and diphtheria, just hours after an emergency tracheotomy had been performed at the Mahlers’ summer house at Maiernigg in Carinthia. A few days after the funeral, a physician who had come to examine Mahler’s exhausted wife and her seriously ill mother, responding to the composer’s half-joking “as long as you’re here you might as well have a look at me too,” discovered that things were not as they should be with Mahler’s heart. Most biographies report a diagnosis of subacute bacterial endocarditis. Recent interpretation of the evidence suggests that what was discovered was a defect in the mitral valve, presumably stemming either from Mahler’s family history or rheumatic fever. Subacute bacterial endocarditis would be a result of this defect, but would probably have developed no earlier than the fall of 1910. It is not a condition Mahler would have been likely to survive for four years. Beginning with Mahler’s widow, biographers have tended to dramatize the account of Mahler’s physical condition after the summer of 1907.

In any event, Mahler, that dedicated hiker, cyclist, and swimmer, to say nothing of fiery conductor, was put on a regimen of depressingly restricted activity. Still, what happened from 1907 until 1911 is not the life story of an invalid. 1907: Concerts in Saint Petersburg and Helsingfors (Helsinki) and Mahler’s meeting with Sibelius; the last opera performance (*Fidelio*) and the last concert (his own Symphony No. 2) in Vienna; departure for New York. 1908: Performances at the Metropolitan Opera at the beginning and end of the year; concerts with the New York Symphony; the premiere in Prague of the three-year-old Symphony No. 7; the composition that summer of *Das Lied von der Erde*. 1909: The termination of his association with the Met and the start of a three-year contract with the dilapidated New York Philharmonic; work on the Symphony No. 9. 1910: Concerts with the Philharmonic in New York and other American cities; engagements in Paris and Rome; the triumphant premiere in Munich of the Symphony No. 8 (written in the summer of 1906); the completion of the Ninth Symphony, followed immediately by extensive and concentrated work on the Tenth, and a meeting at Leyden with Freud. 1911: The last New York Philharmonic concert on February 21, including the premiere of Busoni’s *Berceuse élégiaque—A Man’s Cradle Song at his Mother’s Coffin*; the onset of a streptococcal blood infection; unsuccessful serum treatment in Paris, and, on May 18, death in a Vienna sanatorium.

In his Ninth Symphony, Mahler returns to a four-movement design for the first time since the Sixth Symphony of 1903-05. The First and the Fourth are both four-movement symphonies. The First, however, was a five-movement work for the first six years of its existence, while the Fourth is of a special design where the last movement is a brief song-epilogue. If the four movements of the revised First Symphony and of the Sixth still correspond to those of the normal Classical and Romantic symphony, Mahler is clearly after another aim altogether in the Ninth. He begins with a very large movement whose basic tempo is semi-slow but which tends to spill over into allegro. Next comes a double intermezzo in the form of a vividly contrasted pair of scherzos, a set of Lancers and a *Burleske*. The finale is an Adagio whose weight and span approach those of the first movement.

Deryck Cooke proposed that the formal model Mahler had in mind was Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, and the correspondences are indeed clear—big first movements alternating between slow and fast, beginning and ending quietly; the Lancers and Tchaikovsky's gimpy 5/4 waltz; the *Burleske* and Tchaikovsky's brilliant march; the two Adagio finales. History added another parallel in that each symphony was its composer's inadvertent farewell to work and to life. The *Pathétique* was new music when Mahler began his Ninth Symphony, just sixteen years old, and Mahler remembered gratefully Tchaikovsky's admiration of his *Eugene Onegin* performances in Hamburg in 1891.\*

As for the first movement, it is surely Mahler's greatest achievement in symphonic composition. Shortly before Mahler was born, Wagner wrote to Mathilde Wesendonck: "I should now like to call my deepest and most subtle art the art of transition, for the whole fabric of my art is based upon such transitions." The composer Richard Swift has pointed out that it was "with a powerful feeling of recognition" that Mahler first read the Wagner-Wesendonck correspondence in 1904, remarking to his wife upon its "transcendent and superhuman" nature. The Ninth's first movement is the high point of Mahler's own practice in the deep and subtle art of transition, of organic expansion, of continuous variation.

In deep quiet, cellos and horn set a rhythmic frame. The notes are oddly, disconcertingly placed in the time flow; Leonard Bernstein suggested that their halting rhythm represents, or perhaps reflects, the irregular pulse of Mahler's own faltering heart. Cellos and horn play the same pitch, A, and it will be more than fifty measures—more than three minutes of playing time—before we meet a bar in which A is not a crucial component, and then it takes a violent deceptive cadence to wrench the music in another direction. The harp begins a kind of tolling about that low A, while a stopped horn projects another thought, also with A as its point of departure and in a variant of the faltering-pulse rhythm. The accompaniment becomes denser, though it always remains transparent, with each detail highly individual. All this prepares a melody which the second violins build up step by step, full of literal or subtly varied repetitions.

We soon hear that the melody is in fact a duet, for the horn re-emerges with thoughts of its own on the material. Listening still more closely, we can notice that the accompanying figures in the harp, the clarinet, and the elaborately divided lower strings are using the same vocabulary too—the same intervals and the same rhythmic patterns. Do the accompaniments reflect the melody much as good servants take on something of their masters' style, or is the melody—or better, the melodic complex—the expansion of the elements that make up the ever-present, ever-changing background? Before this melody is done growing, the first violins have replaced the horn as the seconds' duet partner, while the clarinet (anticipated by the English horn) and the cellos cross the border, turning from accompanists into singers. In this beginning you have a miraculous example of Mahler's inspired art of transition, so painstakingly worked (as we can tell from the orchestral draft, which has been published in facsimile by Universal Edition, Vienna) and so convincing in its appearance of utter spontaneity and natural growth. The transitions, moreover, exist in two dimensions—horizontal, as the melody proceeds through time from one event to the next, and vertical, in the integration of the melodic strands and their accompaniments. This long opening melody keep returning, always with new details of shape and texture, and its D major presence is the soil in which the movement is rooted. Another element of which we become intensely aware is the stepwise descent through a third. Mahler marks this "*Lebewohl*" ("Farewell") in his sketches, and he is alluding to Beethoven, whose *Farewell* Sonata, Opus 81a, begins with exactly this gesture. Mahler even emulates the way Beethoven makes the phrase overlap with itself to create poignant dissonances.

The most persistent element of contrast comes in the form of an impassioned, thrusting theme in minor, whose stormy character is new but whose intervals, rhythms, and accompaniments continue the

patterns established earlier. In Mahler's harmonic design, the corresponding "opposition" to D major is a pull toward the flat side, sometimes to D minor, more often and more powerfully all the way over to B-flat minor. The "faltering pulse" and the harp tollings persist; dramatic abruptions shatter the long-breathed, seamless continuities; urgent trumpet signals mark towering climaxes. From one of these high points the music plunges into sudden quiet and the slowest tempo so far. The coda is virtually chamber music with simultaneous monologues of all but dissociated instruments—flute, oboe, violin, piccolo, horn, just a few strands of cellos and basses to begin with. The intervals between events become wider—it is as though the music continued, but beyond our hearing—until at last silence wins out over sound. With the completion of this immense and wonderfully poised arch, about one third of the great symphony is done.

The second movement returns us forcefully to earth. Mahler always had a love for the vernacular, and here is one more of his fantastical explorations of dance music. He shows us three kinds: a Landler in C, leisurely, clumsy, heavy-footed, coarse (the adjectives are Mahler's); something much quicker and more waltz-like in slightly soured E major (and taken over almost literally by Shostakovich in the scherzo of his Fifth Symphony); and another Landler, this one in F, the slowest of these three musics, gentle, lilting, sentimental. These tunes, tempos, and characters lend themselves to delightful combinations and interchanges. This movement, too, finishes in a disintegrating coda, but the effect here is toward an intriguing mixture of the ghostly and the cute.

Where the second movement was expansive and leisurely, the third, which Mahler styles *Burleske* and which he wants played "very defiantly," is music of violent urgency. The first four measures, which take about three seconds to play, hurl three distinct motifs at us. That sort of concentration is fair warning of what is to follow. Mahler inscribed the autograph "to my brothers in Apollo," connecting this reference to the leader of the muses to the virtuosic display of contrapuntal craft unleashed here. A contrasting Trio brings a march and even some amiability—also, later, a twisted reminiscence of one of the exuberant march tunes in the Third Symphony's first movement. Most surprising, and deeply touching as well, is the trumpet's shining D major transformation of one of the *Burleske*'s most jagged themes into a melody of tenderly consoling warmth. It is, however, the fierce music, returning now at still greater speed and in yet more ferocious temper, that brings this movement to its crashing final cadence.

Now Mahler builds an Adagio to balance and, as it were, to complete the first movement. He begins with a great cry of violins, harmonically close to the A minor we have just left, and leading surprisingly into distant D-flat major. In his earlier four-movement symphonies he had ended in the original keys; here, as is more often his preference, he takes the conclusion to another key. In the optimistic No. 5 he goes up half a step from C-sharp to D, but for this wrenching close he goes down by the same interval, from D to D-flat.

With D-flat major clearly established as home, all the strings, who are adjured to play with big tone, sound a richly textured hymn. Their song is interrupted for a moment by a quiet, virtually unaccompanied phrase of a single bassoon, but impassioned declamation in the choral style immediately resumes. That other world, however, insists on its rights, and Mahler gives us passages of a ghostly and hollow music, very high and very low. Between the two extremes there is a great chasm. The two musics alternate, the hymnic song being more intense and urgent at each of its returns. We hear echoes of *Das Lied von der Erde* and phrases from the *Burleske*.

Here, too, disintegration begins. All instruments but the strings fall silent. Cellos sing a phrase which they can scarcely bear to let go. Then, after a great stillness, the music seems to draw breath to begin again, even slower than before: *Adagissimo*, slow, and *ppp* to the end, Mahler warns. As though with infinite regret, with almost every trace of physicality removed, muted strings recall moments of their—and our—journey. The first violins, alone unmuted among their colleagues, remember something from still longer ago, the *Kindertotenlieder*, those laments on the deaths of children that Mahler, to his wife's horror, had written two years before death took his daughter Maria. "*Der Tag ist schön auf jenen Höh'n!*"—the day is so lovely on those heights.

"Might this not," asks Mahler's biographer Michael Kennedy, "be his requiem for his daughter, dead only two years when he began to compose it, and for his long-dead brothers and sisters...?" More and more, the music recedes, a kind of polyphony to the last, the cellos and second violins gently firm, the first violins and violas softly afloat. Grief gives way to peace, music and silence become one.

Michael Steinberg

\*Mahler conducted several performances of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*, but all in January and March 1910, after the completion of the full draft of the Ninth Symphony and while the orchestration was in progress.

**THE FIRST UNITED STATES PERFORMANCES—WHICH WERE ALSO THE FIRST BOSTON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCES**—of Mahler's Ninth Symphony were led by Serge Koussevitzky on October 16 and 17, 1931, Koussevitzky and the BSO also giving the New York premiere the following month, on November 19, as well as further performances in Boston and New York between 1932 and 1941 (see page 31 for a related program book feature). The BSO has also played the Mahler Ninth under Richard Burgin, Rafael Kubelik, Michael Tilson Thomas, Leonard Bernstein, Seiji Ozawa (first in 1984, followed by later performances in Boston, at Tanglewood, in New York, and on tour in Europe), Kent Nagano (deputizing for Ozawa in November/December 1984), and Bernard Haitink. The BSO's most recent Tanglewood performance was given by Ozawa on July 8, 1989. The most recent subscription performances were also given by Ozawa, in April 2002—his final concerts as BSO music director.

**In Defense of Mahler's Music—**

**A Letter from Aaron Copland to the Editor of the "New York Times"**

Reprinted from the Boston Symphony Orchestra program of October 16 and 17, 1931—the program book for the United States premiere of Mahler's Ninth Symphony under the baton of Serge Koussevitzky—this letter from Aaron Copland to the *New York Times*, dated April 2, 1925, reflects a period when Mahler's music was still basically unfamiliar, and even puzzling, to audiences, and critics, on this side of the Atlantic.

The first Mahler symphony to enter the BSO's repertoire was no. 5, introduced here by Wilhelm Gericke in February 1906. Karl Muck introduced the second to BSO audiences in January 1918, and Pierre Monteux the first in November 1923. The Ninth followed in 1931, the Fourth (under Richard Burgin) in 1942, the Seventh (under Koussevitzky) in 1948, the Adagio from the unfinished Tenth in 1953 (Burgin again), the third only in 1962 (again Burgin), the sixth in 1964 (under Erich Leinsdorf), and the Eighth in 1972 (at Tanglewood under Ozawa; not until 1980 did the BSO play the Eighth in symphony hall, again with Ozawa).

To the Editor of the *New York Times*:

The music critics of New York City are agreed upon at least one point—Gustav Mahler, as a composer, is hopeless. Year in and year out, the performance of one of Mahler's works is invariably accompanied by the same disparaging reviews. Yet no critic has been able to explain just what it is that [the conductor Willem] Mengelberg—and for that matter all Germany, Austria, and Holland—finds so admirable in Mahler's music.

If I write in defense of Mahler it is not merely for the pleasure of contradicting the critics. As a matter of fact, I also realize that Mahler has at times written music which is bombastic, longwinded, banal. What our critics say regarding his music is, as a rule, quite justified, but it is what they leave unsaid that seems to me unfair.

If one discounts for the moment the banal themes, the old-fashioned romantico-philosophical conceptions so dear to Mahler—if one looks at the music *quâ* music—then it is undeniable that Mahler is a composer of today. The Second Symphony, which dates from 1894, is thirty years ahead of its time. From the standpoint of orchestration, Mahler is head and shoulders above Strauss, whose orchestral methods have already dated so perceptibly. Mahler orchestrates on big, simple lines, in which each note is of importance. He manages his enormous number of instruments with extraordinary economy, there are no useless doublings, instrument is pitted against instrument, group against group. So recent a score as Honegger's "Pacific 231" is proof of Mahler's living influence.

The present-day renewed interest in polyphonic writing cannot fail to reflect glory on Mahler's consummate mastery of that delicate art. The contrapuntal weaving of voices in the Eighth Symphony—especially in the first part—is one side of Mahler's genius which I believe the critics have not sufficiently appreciated.

As for the banality of Mahler's thematic material, I have found that generally no matter how ordinary the melody may be, there is always somewhere, either in the beginning or end, one note, one harmony, one slight change which gives the Mahler touch. (Every page he wrote has the individual quality that we demand from every great composer—he was never more Mahler than when he was copying Mozart.) In any case, even when his musical ideas prove barren, I am fascinated by what he does with them and how he clothes them.

That Mahler has on occasion been grandiloquent is undeniable, but I fail to find any bombast whatsoever in “Das Lied von der Erde.” Most critics, I believe, would agree with that statement. Yet they are so prone to discussing Mahler's music in generalities that any one unfamiliar with that composition would be led to suppose that it, too, was full of sound and fury signifying nothing.

Mahler has possibly never written a perfect masterpiece; yet, in my opinion, such things as the first movement of the Seventh Symphony, the scherzo of the Ninth, the last movement of the Fourth, and the entire “Das Lied von der Erde” have in them the stuff of living music.

AARON COPLAND

New York, April 2, 1925

[To Read and Hear More...](#)

*The Cambridge Companion to Berg*, edited by Anthony Pople, is a useful source of information on the composer and his music (Cambridge paperback). Pople also authored *Berg Violin Concerto* in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series (also Cambridge paperback). The best general studies of Berg's music are Douglas Jarman's *The Music of Alban Berg* (University of California) and George Perle's *The Operas of Alban Berg*, which actually deals with the non-operatic music as well (also University of California). Jarman also edited the symposium volume *The Berg Companion*, which includes an essay by him on the Violin Concerto (Northeastern), and provided the Berg entry in the 2001 edition of *The New Grove*. The Berg article in the 1980 *Grove* is by Perle. Also of interest is Theodor Adorno's *Alban Berg: Master of the Smallest Link*, to which Michael Steinberg refers in the program note (Cambridge). An expanded version of Steinberg's note can be found in his compilation volume *The Concerto—A Listener's Guide* (Oxford paperback). There are English-language biographies of Berg—none of them ideally reliable—by Willi Reich, Mosco Carner, and Karen Monson. Useful information can be found in *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, edited by Julianne Brand, Christopher Hailey, and Donald Harris (Norton), and in *Alban Berg: Letters to his Wife*, translated by Bernard Grun (St. Martin's).

James Levine recorded the Berg Violin Concerto in 1992 with Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon). The Boston Symphony Orchestra led by Seiji Ozawa recorded it in 1978 with Itzhak Perlman (Deutsche Grammophon “Originals”). Other noteworthy recordings include Frank Peter Zimmermann's with Gianluigi Gelmetti and the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra (EMI), Daniel Hope's with Paul Watkins and the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Warner Classics), Thomas Zehetmair's with Heinz Holliger and the Philharmonia Orchestra (Apex), Mark Kaplan's with Lawrence Foster and the Budapest Festival Orchestra (Koch), and Isaac Stern's with Leonard Bernstein and the New York Philharmonic (Sony Classical, paired with another work of Berg's to be performed by the BSO this coming February, his Concerto for Piano, Violin, and Thirteen Winds). Violinist Rebecca Hirsch with Eri Klas conducting the Netherlands Radio Symphony Orchestra offers a budget-label account of the Violin Concerto (Naxos). Though neither seems to be readily available at the moment, two historic live performances are worth seeking, both with violinist Louis Krasner, who played the premiere: one from 1936 with Anton von Webern conducting the BBC Symphony Orchestra (Testament Continuum), the other from 1938 with Fritz Busch conducting the Stockholm Philharmonic (GM).

Paul Banks's Mahler article from *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (1980) was reprinted in *The New Grove Turn of the Century Masters: Janáček, Mahler, Strauss, Sibelius* (Norton

paperback). The Mahler article in the revised Grove (2001) is by Paul Franklin. Michael Kennedy's *Mahler* in the Master Musicians series (Oxford paperback) and Kurt Blaukopf's *Mahler* (Limelight paperback) also provide good starting points. Deryck Cooke's *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to his Music* is a first-rate brief guide to the composer's music (Cambridge University paperback). Michael Steinberg's program notes on the nine Mahler symphonies and the unfinished Tenth are in his compilation volume *The Symphony—A Listener's Guide* (Oxford paperback). *Gustav Mahler: Letters to his Wife*, edited by Antony Beaumont, Henry-Louis de La Grange, and Gunther Weiss (Cornell University Press; Beaumont previously compiled *Alma Mahler-Werfel: Diaries 1898-1902*, from the same publisher), and *Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis*, by Stuart Feder, a psychoanalytic view of the composer's life (Yale University Press), are important, relatively recent additions to the Mahler bibliography. Published in 1999, *The Mahler Companion*, edited by Donald Mitchell and Andrew Nicholson, is an important volume of essays devoted to Mahler's life, works, and milieu, with individual chapters on all of the major works, including a chapter by Stephen E. Hefling on the Ninth Symphony (Oxford). The biography *Mahler* by Jonathan Carr offers an accessible approach aimed at beginners and enthusiasts (Overlook Press). Henry-Louis de La Grange's biography of Mahler, originally in French, and of which a four-volume English version is planned, so far includes two English-language volumes—*Vienna: The Years of Challenge, 1897-1904* and *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion, 1904-1907* (Oxford). The out-of-print, original first volume of La Grange's study, entitled simply *Mahler*, and due for revision, covered Mahler's life and work through January 1902 (Doubleday). The other big Mahler biography, Donald Mitchell's, so far extends to three volumes—*Volume I: The Early Years*; *Volume II: The Wunderhorn Years*; and *Volume III: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*—covering through the period of *Das Lied von der Erde* (University of California). Alma Mahler's autobiography *And the Bridge is Love* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) and her *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters* (University of Washington paperback) provide important if necessarily subjective source materials. Knud Martner's *Gustav Mahler: Selected Letters* offers a useful volume of correspondence, including all the letters published in Alma's earlier collection (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). Mahler enthusiast and conductor Gilbert Kaplan has seen to the publication of *The Mahler Album* with the aim of bringing together every known photograph of the composer (The Kaplan Foundation with Thames and Hudson). Though now more than twenty years old, Kurt Blaukopf's extensively illustrated *Mahler: A Documentary Study* remains well worth seeking in second-hand shops (Oxford University Press). *Mahler Discography*, edited by Péter Fülöp, will be valuable to anyone interested in Mahler recordings, though its 1995 publication date obviously precludes inclusion of discs issued since then (The Kaplan Foundation).

James Levine recorded Mahler's Symphony No. 9 in 1979 with the Philadelphia Orchestra (RCA; not currently listed); of more recent vintage is his 1998 concert performance with the Munich Philharmonic (Oehms). The Boston Symphony Orchestra recorded the Ninth live in 1989 with Seiji Ozawa conducting as part of their Mahler cycle for Philips (not readily available). Other noteworthy recordings (listed alphabetically by conductor) include Leonard Bernstein's first with the New York Philharmonic (Sony Classical) and later with the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam (Deutsche Grammophon), Pierre Boulez's with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Carlo Maria Giulini's with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (Deutsche Grammophon), Bernard Haitink's with the Concertgebouw Orchestra (Philips), Jascha Horenstein's with the London Symphony Orchestra (a 1966 concert performance on BBC Legends), Herbert von Karajan's with the Berlin Philharmonic (Deutsche Grammophon), Kurt Masur's with the New York Philharmonic (Teldec), and Benjamin Zander's with the Philharmonia Orchestra (Telarc). The historically minded should also know about Bruno Walter's live 1938 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic (EMI "Great Recordings of the Century").

Marc Mandel

### Guest Artist

#### Christian Tetzlaff

Christian Tetzlaff is internationally recognized as one of the most important violinists of his generation. In honor of his artistic achievements, *Musical America* named Mr. Tetzlaff "Instrumentalist of the Year" in 2005. He performs and records a broad spectrum of repertoire, ranging from Bach's unaccompanied sonatas and partitas to 19th-century masterworks by Mendelssohn, Beethoven, and Brahms, and from 20th-century concertos by Bartók, Berg, and Stravinsky to world premieres of contemporary works. Since his performances of the Schoenberg Violin Concerto that brought him to international attention at age twenty-two—with

Christoph von Dohnányi and the Cleveland Orchestra, and with Sergiu Celibidache and the Munich Philharmonic—he has been recognized for his playing of the less frequently heard areas of the literature; yet Mozart and Brahms remain just as central to his musical development. Also dedicated to chamber music, he collaborates frequently with such distinguished artists as Leif Ove Andsnes, Lars Vogt, Sabine Meyer, Heinrich Schiff, and Tabea Zimmermann. Mr. Tetzlaff was born in Hamburg in 1966, to a minister's family in which music occupied a central place. His three siblings are all professional musicians; he frequently performs with his sister Tanja, a cellist. Mr. Tetzlaff began playing violin and piano at six, but pursued a regular academic education while continuing his musical studies; he began intensive study of the violin only at fourteen, when he made his debut with the Beethoven concerto. He attributes the establishment of his musical outlook to his teacher at the conservatory in Lübeck, Uwe-Martin Haiberg, who placed equal stress on interpretation and technique. He came to the United States during the 1985-86 academic year to work with Walter Levine at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, and also spent two summers at the Marlboro Music Festival in Vermont. Mr. Tetzlaff has been in demand as a soloist with many of the world's leading ensembles and conductors, establishing close artistic partnerships that are renewed season after season. He has performed with the orchestras of Chicago, Cleveland, Boston, Philadelphia, New York (both the Philharmonic and the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra), San Francisco, and Toronto, among many others, and also appears regularly in recital and with major orchestras in Berlin, Vienna, London, Paris, Amsterdam, Munich, and Rome. Highlights of 2007-08 include appearances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Detroit Symphony, New World Symphony, and Saint Louis Symphony, and a series of concerts playing all ten Beethoven violin sonatas with pianist Alexander Lonquich at the 92nd Street Y in New York. Mr. Tetzlaff's recordings for Virgin Classics reflect the breadth of his musical interests. They include concertos ranging from Haydn to Bartók; an album of 20th-century sonatas by Janáček, Debussy, Ravel, and Nielsen with Leif Ove Andsnes; the complete works for violin and orchestra of Jean Sibelius, which won the prestigious Diapason d'or; the Brahms violin sonatas with pianist Lars Vogt for EMI; a Grammy-nominated album of Bartók's violin sonatas 1 and 2 (with Leif Ove Andsnes) and Sonata for Solo Violin on Virgin Classics; Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto for PentaTone Classics; Beethoven's Violin Concerto for Arte Nova, and a new recording of the Bach's sonatas and partitas for solo violin on the Musical Heritage and Haenssler labels. A recording of the Brahms and Joachim violin concertos with Thomas Dausgaard and the Danish Radio Orchestra will be released on Virgin Classics in late 2007. Mr. Tetzlaff makes his home near Frankfurt with his wife, a clarinetist with the Frankfurt Opera, and their three children. He currently performs on a violin made by the German violin maker Peter Greiner, modeled after a Guarneri del Gesù. Christian Tetzlaff made his Boston Symphony debut in November 1990 with Schumann's Violin Concerto and has since appeared with the BSO both in Symphony Hall and at Tanglewood, in concertos of Berg, Ligeti, Beethoven, Sibelius, Szymanowski, Brahms, Mozart, and Schoenberg. His most recent BSO appearances were at Tanglewood in July 2005, for music of Mozart; and in subscription concerts in November 2006, when he performed both the Beethoven and Schoenberg violin concertos in the same program as part of the Levine/BSO Beethoven/Schoenberg cycle.