

INTRODUCTION

Gustav Mahler was early recognized as one of the greatest conductors of his time. Yet he was highly controversial as a composer, both during his life and in the years after his death. In 1933, because of his Jewish roots, the Nazis prohibited his music both in Germany and in the occupied countries. His last refuge was then the Anglo-Saxon world. It is only in the sixties that little by little his music found its rightful place in concert repertoires, thanks largely to recordings.



Portrait taken in New York (1910)
[Centre Documentation
Musicale-BGM]

Mahler was long accused of being "banal" because of the heterogeneous nature of his melodic material and "sentimental" because of his expressiveness, which was thought to be self-indulgent. Today, his use of stylized folk material seems to be one of the most original and forward-looking aspects of his style. For us, he is an exceptional composer, not just because of the breadth and power of his ten symphonies, but also because of his place in history, right at the junction of two centuries and two eras—the romantic and the modern. His evolution is fascinating, from the First Symphony of his youth, which doesn't resemble any other music of his time, all the way to the Ninth, which is very close to the future masterpieces of Berg and Webern. Theodor Adorno said that Mahler was the first musician since Beethoven to have a "late style".

Today, Mahler is one of the most popular composers of our time. There are countless recordings of his works. A philosopher, a theoretician of music, a wide-ranging thinker, a mystic far removed from any dogma, he also stands as one of the most universal artists in history. His music eludes definition. It contains everything that makes a world, all that makes humanity: serenity and rebellion, compassion and sarcasm, lyricism and violence, subjectivity and objectivity, sincerity and ambiguity, compassion and derision, the sublime and the commonplace, intuition and reflection, heroism and confidence. The unfathomable complexity of his works has given rise to countless essays, studies, dissertations, articles and books.

andante will collect a vast documentation on this great musician who for so long went unrecognized. You will find there a comprehensive chronology of his life, a catalogue and analyses of his works, a constantly updated bibliography and discography, as well as a list of the most important performances of his music throughout the world.

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SYMPHONY NO. 1

At age 20, Gustav Mahler had only one aim in life: to become a composer. Later he said that the conservative jury that in 1881 had refused to award him the Vienna Beethoven Prize was entirely responsible for the long years he had to spend in the 'prison', the 'hell' of the theatre. 'If you want to compose', he said at the end of his life to the young Alban Berg, 'avoid the theatre at all costs'. But to survive at a time when all he possessed were his gifts and his hopes, what else could a young musician do?

And yet Gustav Mahler was a born composer! *Das klagende Lied*, the great ballad or cantata for solo voices, chorus and orchestra which he submitted for the famous prize, proved it, in his opinion, at least. But since the 'infernal judges' of his time had decided otherwise, he had to prove his talent in another field. And so, at 20, Mahler threw himself into the profession of orchestral conductor with a seriousness and an ardour bordering on the fanatical. For four years he gave up composing, his activities in the theatre affording him not the slightest respite. He took up the composer's pen again only by the force of an unhappy love affair. Four years earlier, in 1880, a similar experience had driven him to compose *Das klagende Lied*. It seemed that love alone, and particularly disappointed love, was the stimulus which, at that time, could induce the young Mahler to 'find the way back to my true self' through composing.

Composition

In 1884 the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* were the outcome of his infatuation with a soprano at the Kassel Theatre, where he held the post of Kapellmeister. This cycle of songs for voice and orchestra was destined to remain undisturbed among his papers for almost twelve years. Meanwhile another hopeless love affair—the object of his affection this time was married and a mother of four children—again triggered the creative process: 'these emotions had reached such a degree of intensity in me that they suddenly burst out in an impetuous stream'. That was in 1888. Mahler, now 27, was conductor at the Leipzig Theatre. The lady in question was none other than the wife of Weber's grandson, wife of the man who had provided to Mahler the unfinished sketches for a comic opera by his grandfather, the great Karl Maria. By completing *Die drei Pintos*, Mahler achieved the first notable success in his career as composer, as the task involved as much original composition as rearrangement. His passion for Marion von Weber thus plunged him into the deepest despair, for he could never forget that his relationship with her involved a betrayal of the generous friendship her husband offered him. Early in the new year, 1888, the Leipzig Opera was closed—Germany was in mourning for its emperor Wilhelm I—and for a few short days Mahler could devote himself without interruption to composing. Begun in January, his Symphonic Poem, later to be called his First Symphony, was finished in March. It had five movements, for Mahler had inserted a little Andante borrowed from an earlier piece of stage music.

First Performances

'I was totally unaware', Mahler confessed later, 'that I had written one of my boldest works. I naively imagined that it was childishly simple, that it would please immediately and that I was going to be able to live comfortably on the royalties it would earn'. So much for the illusions of a young composer! The following summer he moved heaven and earth to have his work performed—in Prague, Munich, Dresden and Leipzig—but in vain. He finally had to conduct the first performance himself at the Budapest Philharmonic on 20 November 1889. And even then his Symphonic Poem was only included in the programme because its composer was none other than the already celebrated director of the Hungarian Opera. Alas, on the evening of the unfortunate première, the conservative Budapest public reacted with stupefaction that quickly gave way to suppressed indignation. The violence of the Finale left the audience dazed, and the closing chords were followed by a deathly silence, finally broken by some timid applause interspersed with booing. Mahler understood that he had just been preaching in the desert. Even his best friends were dismayed: 'Afterwards everyone avoided me; no one dared to talk to me about my work'. The critics were as hostile as the audience had been. He was accused of deliberately indulging in nonsensical bizzarrie, crazy cacophony, brazen vulgarity—in short blaspheming all the canons of music. Lonely and despairing, Mahler wandered through the streets of the Hungarian capital 'like a plague victim, an outcast'.

In 1891, Mahler left Budapest for Hamburg to take up the post of first conductor at the Stadttheater, one of the more important German opera houses. One evening in October 1893, in one of the Hamburg concert halls, he conducted a 'Popular Concert in Philharmonic style' composed entirely of first performances of his works, one of which was entitled 'Titan: a musical poem in symphonic form'. The audience's reaction was slightly more favourable than in Budapest, but the Hamburg critics again accused Mahler of a total lack of discernment in his choice of material, of giving free rein to his 'subjectivity', and of 'mortally offending the sense of beauty'.

After a third setback in Weimar, Mahler tried again in 1896 in Berlin. The work was henceforth shorn of its Andante and bore its definitive title of 'First Symphony'. Every two or three years until the end of his life Mahler conducted this accursed 'First', which almost always disappointed audiences by even after they became familiar with his style and language. The taint of this 'Sinfonia ironica' (the term was invented by the Viennese critic Max Kalbeck) hung over it long after Mahler's death. During the 1920s and 30s it enjoyed a measure of popularity, but this was mainly because of its relatively modest proportions in comparison to his other symphonies and the smaller amount of orchestral resources it called for.

Programmes

To enable the public to understand it more easily, Mahler drew up several 'programmes', all more or less along the same lines, for his 'Symphonic Poem' later to become a Symphony. From the start he made it clear that the original title of the work—'Titan'—had nothing to do with the celebrated novel by Jean Paul Richter, and that the famous As in harmonics at the beginning evoke a morning scene in the forest, when the summer sun 'vibrates and sparkles' through the branches. The programme in 1893, when the Andante was still part of the work, was as follows:

Part I

'Memories of Youth': fruit, flower and thorn pieces

1. 'Spring goes on and on' (Introduction and Allegro comodo).
The introduction describes nature's awakening from its long winter sleep.
2. 'Blumine' (Andante).
3. 'Full sail' (Scherzo).

Part II

4. 'Aground!' (A funeral march in the style of Callot).

The following will help to explain this movement: the initial inspiration for it was found by the composer in a burlesque engraving: 'The Huntsman's Funeral', well known to all Austrian children, and taken from an old book of fairy stories. The animals of the forest accompany the dead huntsman's coffin to the graveside; hares carry the pennant, then comes a band of Bohemian musicians, followed by cats, toads, crows, etc., all playing their instruments, while stags, deer, foxes and other fourlegged and feathered creatures of the forest accompany the procession with droll attitudes and gestures. This movement is intended to express a mood alternating between ironic gaiety and uncanny brooding, which is then suddenly interrupted by:

5. 'Dall'Inferno' (Allegro Furioso)

the sudden outburst of despair from a deeply wounded heart.

This text, which devotes more space to the grotesque Funeral March than to all the other movements combined, shows that Mahler was aware of the March's originality and feared that it might puzzle the audience. The same indeed might be said of the whole of the work, with its mixture of sorrow and irony, the grotesque and the sublime, tragedy and humour. None of this can be explained without the literary references that Mahler himself readily provided from the start. Not only are some of the original 'titles' of the movements borrowed from Jean Paul, but the whole work is steeped in the atmosphere of German romantic literature and finds its themes and underlying inspiration in the permanent conflict between idealism and realism to be found in the works of E.T.A. Hoffmann and Jean Paul, between the demands of a spirit animated by the cult of beauty and goodness and the degrading realities of everyday life. The 1893 'programme' mentions the French engraver Jacques Callot (1592-1635), so dear to the hearts of the German Romantics, and Hoffmann in particular, though it must be said that the well-known engraving of 'The Huntsman's Funeral' was in fact the work of the Austrian painter Moritz von Schwind, friend of Schubert and Grillparzer.

Various Versions

Composed in 1888, the First Symphony was entirely revised by Mahler in January 1893. It was then that he cut out an episode from the Finale (just before the coda) and replaced it with one of the most astonishing passages in the score, the angry unison motif of the violas that gradually brings back the first theme. But later he changed many other details, something he was always going to do every time one of his works was performed anew. The most important of these were made in 1897 when a first edition of the work was published, while others occurred in 1906 when the definitive version was published by Universal Edition.

Instrumentation

The orchestration of the First Symphony as we know it today dates more or less from 1897. It requires four of each of the woodwinds but a large number of brass (7 horns, 5 trumpets, 4 trombones, a tuba), two drummers and a plentiful supply of percussion. The refinement and sometimes even the novelty of the sonorities never cease to surprise and astonish, especially since most of the boldest innovations were already in the 1893 manuscript. When his faithful friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner asked him about this in 1900, Mahler replied: 'That comes from the way I use the instruments. In this first movement they disappear behind a radiant sea of sounds, just as a lamp becomes invisible behind the brilliance which it gives out. In the March movement the instruments are disguised and go round dressed as strangers. Everything has to sound deadened and muffled, as if ghosts were parading past us. To ensure that in the canon each new entry comes over distinctly, with a surprising tone colour that draws attention to itself as it were—that caused me a real headache! Eventually I got the instrumentation right, so that it produced that weird, otherworldly effect you noticed today. And I don't think anyone has yet managed to work out how I achieve it. When I want to produce a soft, restrained sound, I don't give it to instruments which can produce it easily, but to one which can produce it only with effort, reluctantly, indeed often only by forcing and going beyond its natural limits. So I often make the double basses and the bassoon squeak out the highest notes, while the flutes are puffing away deep down below...'

Analysis

One of the most characteristic features of Mahler's works is the close link between Lieder and symphonies, the Lieder being as it were the sources that nourish the symphonic river. In the First, the thematic material of the initial Allegro is almost entirely derived from the second of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, while the second Trio of the Funeral March is a literal quotation from the concluding passage of the last Lied in that cycle. To give greater cohesion to the whole, Mahler builds up most of his themes from an ascending or descending fourth. Already in the introduction we hear the fourth symbolising the awakening of spring with the cuckoo's song (slightly modified here, since in reality the cuckoo sings a descending third).

1. *Langsam. Schleppend. Wie ein Naturlaut.* [Slow. Dragging. Like a sound of Nature]. 4/4, D minor. Few composers have succeeded in evoking so poetically and with such simple means the romantic magic of nature's awakening: its birdsongs, its legendary hunting horns and distant fanfares. We can almost see the young Mahler here, as he has described himself—a child, lost interminably in his

dreams, all alone, motionless, in the heart of the forest, in a trance, listening to the slightest sound from near or far. Between the development and the reexposition of the first movement comes a varied reprise of the introduction with numerous modifications, as always with Mahler.

—*Immer sehr gemächlich* [Very restrained throughout], 2/2, D major. In this Allegro, which consists almost entirely of a single theme, Mahler amplifies and continuously develops the second of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* without ever giving an impression of effort or repetitiveness. This 'Symphonic Fantasia' always seems to flow from its source with an air of spontaneity and freedom that are the acme of art.

2. *Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell* [Vigorous and lively, but not too fast], 3/4, A major. This is undoubtedly the most rustic of all Mahler's Scherzos in Ländler form, but it is also one of the most enjoyable. Several motifs in it are derived from a Lied Mahler composed when he was 20 years old, *Hans und Grethe*. In the Trio (*Recht gemächlich. Etwas langsamer* [restrained. Somewhat slower], F major), the dance becomes more graceful; the shadow of Bruckner can be glimpsed here, no doubt because the Ländler and waltzes come from the same Austrian folklore sources.

3. *Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen* [Solemn and measured, without dragging], 4/4, D minor. This grotesque Funeral March is certainly the most fascinating movement of the four. Its originality surprises us even today and strikes us as prophetic in many respects. No wonder it upset and scandalised the audiences of the time. The canon ('Frère Jacques' in the minor) is introduced by a double bass solo in its highest register. It is then taken up successively by the bassoon, the cellos, the tuba, then by various instrumental groups. The sounds are 'disguised and camouflaged', just as Mahler wanted them to be. Quite soon the oboe superimposes a first 'grotesque' motif on the canon. The crescendo that then gradually builds up comes not from louder playing but by the gradual increase in the number of instruments brought in. Then everything is interrupted by the entry of the 'Musikanten' (street musicians) who, with their popular refrains and Bohemian glissandi, introduce an element of deliberate 'banality' and 'vulgarity'. Street music, simple and unadorned, intrudes here for the first time in the sacrosanct domain of the symphony. One can easily understand why the guardians of musical propriety were profoundly shocked. It should be remembered however that the offending music belonged to an 'imaginary folklore' whose sources would be impossible to trace in any of the popular song collections of the time.

After returning once more to the March, the music passes without transition from the grotesque to the sublime with '*Auf der Strasse steht ein Lindenbaum*', the coda section of the last of the *Gesellen-Lieder*. The whole of the melody is played in G major on the strings. And then, at once, the March resumes inexorably, this time in the key furthest removed from the remainder of the movement, that is to say E-flat minor. In this new key, the 'Musikanten' come in with a restatement of their first 'refrain'. The initial key of D minor is reestablished as if by magic in the space of two bars, and we are back again to the canon, on which Mahler uses all his contrapuntal skill to superimpose a hyperexpressive version of the second 'refrain'. Everything ends in a long, ghostly diminuendo, after which the sudden explosion of the Finale produces one of the most celebrated 'surprises' in the symphonic repertory (comparable to the one that opens the development of the first movement of Tchaikovsky's *Symphonie pathétique*).

4. *Stürmisch bewegt* [Tempestuous] *Energisch. Mit grosser Wildheit* [Vigorous. With great ferocity], F minor/D major, 2/2. This movement, in sonata form, is the only big dramatic movement in the symphony. There is a short introduction that presents, in quick review, fragments from most of the later thematic material. The principal theme, expressing determination, pride and warlike ardour, is one of those ascending motifs that, in all Mahler's works up to the *Lied von der Erde*, appear every time he wishes to suggest aspiration to transcendence and to a higher order.

The somewhat Tchaikovskian character, very exceptional in Mahler, of the second thematic element (*Sehr gesangvoll* [very songlike], D-flat major) has often been noticed, but the mystical stillness of the long violin cantilena is also intensely Mahlerian. Its character is so remote from that of the first theme that Mahler was obliged to exclude it completely from the development that follows. The only element of contrast is provided at the end by an unexpected restatement of the introduction to the first movement. This flows quite naturally into a reprise of the second theme, which itself announces the recapitulation.

The form of this Finale is difficult to grasp at first, but it fascinates us today with its violent outbursts of conflicting emotions that suggest to us the influence of Berlioz and Liszt much more than of Bruckner. What is astonishing about this symphony is of course the novelty of its style and instrumentation, but even more the way it turns its back on contemporary trends, and in particular the world of Wagner, a composer whom Mahler idolised, in order to return to the sources of German romanticism, the novels of Jean-Paul and the tales of Hoffmann as much as the songs of Schubert and the operas of Weber. Mahler was right after all when he spoke to Richard Specht of the curse that hung over him at the beginning of his career as a composer. Did not Beethoven's style, in his first works, owe much to Haydn and Mozart? Had not Wagner's music in his early years imitated the style of Meyerbeer? Why therefore did he, Mahler, at 20, have to be so totally himself?

SYMPHONY NO. 2

Composition

It is hard to imagine that a work as unified and as powerfully structured as Mahler's Second Symphony could have had such a long and painful birth, yet more than six years were to pass between his jotting down the initial sketches and his completion of the vast final movement. He was still only twenty-eight when he completed his First Symphony in 1888 at the height of the opera season in Leipzig, where he had held the position of chief conductor for the last two years. The ink was barely dry on the score when he began to toy with the idea of a second symphony, this time in C minor. The opening movement was soon completed but for the next five years existed independently under the heading of *Todtenfeier* [Funeral Ceremony], a title borrowed from the German translation by his boyhood friend Siegfried Lipiner of an epic poem by the leading Polish writer Adam Mickiewicz. Completed in Prague in August 1888, the full score of the *Todtenfeier* languished among Mahler's papers because, after his appointment as director of the Budapest Opera at the end of the year, he was far too busy with his artistic and administrative responsibilities to return to composition.

Three years later, in 1891, Mahler left the Budapest Opera for the Hamburg Stadt-Theater where, as a conductor, he soon attracted the attention of Hans von Bülow, the doyen of German music and a lifelong champion of new music: having conducted the first performances of *Tristan und Isolde*, Bülow became Brahms's preferred interpreter and, shortly before the events related here, had discovered in Richard Strauss the rising star of the German musical firmament. Mahler hoped that Bülow would similarly support him as a composer, and he called on Bülow in order to play him the *Todtenfeier* on the piano. After playing for a few minutes, he turned around. Bülow had a long face and was covering his ears, and he later summed up his disapproval in two brief phrases: 'If what I have heard is music, I understand nothing about music. [...] Compared with this, *Tristan* is a Haydn symphony.'

Anyone other than Mahler would have felt discouraged. But, with his break with the past now complete, he decided to strike out on his own on a journey fraught with difficulties that only the courage and obstinacy inherent to genius would allow him to complete. Meanwhile, the purgatory of the Hamburg Opera consumed all his time and energy, and it was not until February 1892 that he was able to return to composition, writing and orchestrating five large-scale *Wunderhorn* songs, the fourth of which would later have the singular honour of becoming the final movement of the Fourth Symphony.

Unfortunately, Mahler—who was later to describe himself as a 'summer composer'—had not yet found the peaceful and secluded place that he needed for his work. The summer of 1892 was spent, therefore, at Berchtesgaden in Southern Bavaria, without a single note being written. Wiser for the experience, Mahler took care that the following summer (1893) he and his family were installed at a tiny inn on the shores of the Attersee, not far from Salzburg, where he quickly decided to have a *Komponierhäuschen* built on a small peninsula jutting into the lake. Here he later spent most of his summer months engrossed in creative work. And it was here, too, that he returned to his initial project of a symphony in C minor and soon completed the Andante in A-flat on the basis of sketches jotted down on loose sheets in 1888. Immediately afterwards he wrote the song *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* and the symphony's Scherzo, both of which draw on more or less identical musical material. Work progressed at a dizzying speed, with the ever-faithful Natalie Bauer-Lechner on hand to receive daily progress reports. Mahler felt that he was 'in the grip of a command outside' himself, a musical instrument played by the spirit of the world, the source of all existence. It was in this frame of mind that he completed the second and third movements between 21 June and 16 July. But the end of the summer and, with it, his return to Hamburg were already close at hand, and he had still not embarked on the final movement that was to provide the monumental structure with its culminating cornerstone. To the three existing movements he had merely added the *Wunderhorn* song, *Urlicht*, which was to serve as an introduction to the final movement.

Already envisioning a powerful apotheosis with which to end the work, Mahler thought of following the illustrious example of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and introducing a chorus. He had already begun working his way through the whole of world literature, starting with the Bible, in his search for the 'redemptive word' but had still not found anything suitable when, in February 1894, Hans

von Bülow died. Mahler attended his memorial service and later described the sense of shock that he felt there: 'Then the choir, in the organ-loft, sang Klopstock's *Resurrection* chorale. It was like a flash of lightning, and everything became plain and clear in my mind! [...] It is always the same with me: only when I experience something do I "compose", and only when composing do I experience anything!'

Thus Mahler explained the genesis of this vast final movement to the critic Arthur Seidl three years after its completion. The initial sketches were written down immediately on his return home from the service. The actual composition was completed the following summer at Steinbach within the space of three weeks. Mahler added a number of lines to Klopstock's ode, not only amplifying the poet's ideas but also altering their message. The key passage is as follows:

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,
in heissem Leibesstreben
werd' ich entschweben
zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug' gedrungen!
Sterben werd' ich, um zu leben!
[On hard-won wings, in love's ardent aspiration I shall soar
aloft to the light that no eye has seen. I shall die in order to live!]

Early performances

Unlike his First Symphony, which, in Mahler's own words, always remained his 'child of sorrow', the Second took only a few years to earn a place for itself in the concert hall as his most representative and accomplished work. Admittedly, this was not the case when Strauss arranged the first performance the first three movements at a Philharmonic concert in Berlin in March 1895. Mahler himself conducted, but the hall was half empty and the critics outdid themselves the following morning. The composer was accused of shattering his listeners' eardrums with his 'noisy and bombastic pathos' and 'atrocious, tormenting dissonances', and was granted only the most modest talent. But it took much more than this to discourage the young composer. Nine months later, with the help of two rich patrons from Hamburg, he organised the first performance of the complete work, again in Berlin, but this time with soloists and chorus. Hardly any tickets having been sold in advance, it was necessary to give away large numbers of tickets on the day of the performance. By the end of the evening, the audience's enthusiastic response seemed reassuring, but the next morning's newspapers brought renewed attacks. On this occasion Mahler complained with some bitterness: 'I cannot suppress a deep sigh when I realise that the solid phalanx of the daily press will now, as always, block my way as soon as I appear on the scene with these poor children of mine.' Fortunately, his disappointment was tempered by the enthusiasm of a number of distinguished admirers, such as the conductors Arthur Nikisch and Felix Weingartner and the composer Engelbert Humperdinck. Moreover, his two stout-hearted patrons added to their existing generosity by promising to subsidise the publication of a transcription of the symphony for two pianos.

Be that as it may, Mahler still had a long way to go before he was finally recognised as an important composer. The Second Symphony was the first of his works to be heard outside the German-speaking countries, when Sylvain Dupuis invited Mahler to conduct it at one of his Nouveaux Concerts in Liège. The Munich première, during the winter of 1900/01, created something of a stir, so that Mahler's name was already beginning to become better known by the date of the first performance of the Third Symphony in Krefeld in 1902, a performance which, an almost unequivocal triumph, made him famous overnight. In his capacity as president of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein, Strauss now decided to perform the Second Symphony at the society's annual festival, choosing a jewel of Gothic architecture, the Basel Cathedral, as the venue for the performance. Once again both work and composer were ecstatically received. Later on, the Second became something of a talisman for its creator, with Mahler choosing it to bid farewell to Vienna in 1907 and to introduce himself to New York and Paris in 1908 and 1910 respectively.

Programmes

For Mahler, writing a symphony was tantamount to expressing 'the inner aspect' of his 'whole life', of 'constructing a world with all the technical means at my disposal'. As a result, it was necessary to

facilitate access to this world for unprepared listeners. It was in this spirit that he once again drew up several different, but essentially similar, programmes for the Second Symphony. In the first movement, the 'hero' of the symphony is buried after a long struggle with 'life and destiny'. He casts a backward glance at his life, first at a moment of happiness (depicted in the second movement) and then at the cruel hurly-burly of existence, the 'bustle of appearances' and the 'spirit of disbelief and negation' that had seized hold of him (Scherzo). 'He despairs of himself and of God. [...] Utter disgust for every form of existence and evolution seizes him in an iron grip, tormenting him until he utters a cry of despair.'

In the fourth movement, 'the stirring words of simple faith sound' in the hero's ears and hold out the promise of light. As for the final movement: 'The horror of the day of days has come upon us. The earth trembles, the graves burst open, the dead arise and march forth in endless procession. The great and the small of this earth, the kings and the beggars, the just and the godless, all press forward. The cry for mercy and forgiveness sounds fearful in our ears. The wailing becomes gradually more terrible. Our senses desert us, all consciousness dies as the Eternal Judge approaches. The Last Trump sounds; the trumpets of the Apocalypse ring out. In the eerie silence that follows, we can just barely make out a distant nightingale, a last tremulous echo of earthly life. The gentle sound of a chorus of saints and heavenly hosts is then heard: "Rise again, yes, rise again thou wilt!" Then God in all His glory comes into sight. A wondrous light strikes us to the heart. All is quiet and blissful. Behold: there is no judgement, no sinners, no just men, no great and no small; there is no punishment and no reward. A feeling of overwhelming love fills us with blissful knowledge and illuminates our existence.'

Analysis

1. *Allegro maestoso. Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck* [With deeply serious and solemn expression]. For the first time in his career, Mahler here assumes the full stature of a symphonist in the great German tradition—the tradition of Beethoven, Schubert and Bruckner. With the eloquence of its thematic material, the power of its architectural structures, the emotional thrust of its inspiration and its concision of thought, this funeral march can stand comparison with those in Beethoven's *Eroica* and Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. The shadow of Bruckner hovers over the opening bars with their long initial tremolando and over the forty-three-bar first subject on the lower strings. Yet Mahler's distinctive voice asserts itself in numerous features already present in his first score of 1880, *Das klagende Lied*: note in particular the dominant-tonic melodic progressions and the alternation between major and minor. The structure is still entirely Classical, with two main subject groups, the second of which, in E major, already hints at the work's optimistic conclusion and the final movement's Resurrection theme. Transposed to C major, this same subject also launches the development section with a long and tranquil episode in which the cor anglais underscores the pastoral mood with a gentle *ranz des vaches*. Following a dramatic and agitated reworking of the initial theme, the sense of calm reasserts itself with a second pastoral episode. On this occasion, however, it is brutally interrupted by a furious return of the scalar beginning of the first subject in the 'wrong' key of E-flat minor, punctuated by violent strokes on timpani and tam-tam. This tempestuous episode is soon interrupted in turn by a slow descending scale that ends *pianissimo* in the instruments' lowest register. Against a tremolando accompaniment, a second development section that is as long as the first is set in motion. A new element enters on six horns, a solemn chorale related to the *Dies irae*, that will later play a crucial role in the final movement. The following tutti grows increasingly violent until the return of the initial theme in its original form. The foreshortened recapitulation is followed by a majestic coda in which the various themes gradually disintegrate before the movement ends with a descending scale in rapid triplets, a striking example of the *Einsturz* or collapse that the philosopher Theodor Adorno regarded as typically Mahlerian.

2. *Andante moderato. Sehr gemächlich. Nie eilen* [Very leisurely. Never hurry]. The idyllic second movement is so different in style and atmosphere from the epic scale of the first that Mahler initially demanded a pause of several minutes between them, but he later abandoned this idea that no modern conductor would dream of adopting. Two sections alternate, the first a graceful ländler in the major, the second a triplet theme in the minor. Mahler was particularly proud of the cellos' countermelody that accompanies the second exposition of the principal theme.

3. *In ruhig fliessender Bewegung* [With a gently flowing movement]. The tragic, or at least pessimistic, attitude of this symphonic Scherzo seems worlds apart from the humour of the *Wunderhorn* song in which St Anthony preaches to the fish, which understand nothing of his sermon and look on with a glazed expression, yet both draw on the same musical material. Well versed as he was in the writings of the early German Romantics, Mahler no doubt discovered here an underlying congruity between the tragic and the grotesque. At all events, the comic tale had a deeper meaning for him, inasmuch as he saw in it a reflection of the artist's fate on this earth, perpetually misunderstood by the mass of his fellow humans. It is also worth mentioning that the movement is invariably invested with a negative meaning in the various programmes that Mahler drew up.

Two timpani strokes on the dominant and tonic unleash the Scherzo's 'ceaseless agitation', an uninterrupted and intentionally monotonous double ostinato of semiquavers in the treble and quavers in the bass. Mahler uses deliberately shrill and somewhat grotesque-sounding timbres such as those the E-flat clarinet and piccolo. The bulk of the material the Trio in C major is likewise borrowed from the song, the main exception being the great trumpet solo, an example of 'banality' for which Mahler has often been reproached but which delights us today by dint of its very simplicity. At the end of the movement, the 'cry of despair' alluded to in the symphony's programme is heard on full orchestra in a vast B-flat minor climactic tutti.

4. *Urlicht. Sehr feierlich aber schlicht (Choralmässig)* [Primeval Light. Very solemn but simple (In the manner of a chorale)]. After the 'tormenting' questions of the opening movement and the grotesque dance of the Scherzo, mankind returns to a childlike state and is finally freed from uncertainty and doubt. This *Wunderhorn* song brings with it the first ray of light and opens the way to the final movement, while at the same time allowing the human voice to be heard for the first time. The initial ascending motif, in the singer's lowest register, is already a harbinger of hope and is followed by a solemn chorale which, gently stated on the brass, affirms the calm and innocent faith of childhood. Later, an expanded version of this same ascending theme will become the final movement's Resurrection theme. In the central episode ('Da kam ich auf einen breiten Weg': 'Then I came upon a broad path'), hope is confirmed and doubt vanquished, and the song ends on a note of certainty and tranquil ecstasy.

4. *Im Tempo des Scherzo. Wild herausfahrend.* [At the same speed as the Scherzo. In a wild outburst]. Inspired by one of the most original features of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Mahler, too, recalls an earlier episode—the Scherzo's 'cry of despair'—at the start of the final movement. The reply comes very quickly (*Sehr zurückhaltend* [Very restrained]) in the form of an as yet hesitant statement on the horns of the future Resurrection theme. There follows a 'voice calling in the wilderness', again on the horns this time off-stage, but the contours are once again blurred by a descending triplet figure that works its way down through the orchestra. The wind chorale that is heard against pizzicato quavers on the strings announces some of the characteristic intervals of the Resurrection theme, while at the same time recalling the Dies irae theme from the opening movement. But the time for certainty has not yet come. A long orchestral recitative elaborates the theme of human frailty and the anxiety of God's creatures as the much-feared hour approaches. (This theme is later taken up in the coda by the two soloists.) The reply comes in the form of the chorale to which the lower brass add a note of new solemnity. The heavens brighten and the return of the brass fanfare prepares for a new statement of the theme, only this time much more assertive. This whole series of episodes is linked together in a way that follows dramatic, rather than musical, rules and constitutes a vast prelude almost two hundred bars in length. As such, it may be compared to the operatic overtures that present the work's chief themes before the curtain rises.

An arresting crescendo on the percussion (timpani, side drum, bass drum and tam-tams) that Alban Berg would later recall in *Wozzeck* introduces the Allegro energico, a vast symphonic free-for-all based on most of the themes already heard. A return of the 'cry of despair' produces a startling effect that is one of the first instances in the history of music of what might be termed 'spatialisation'. The off-stage brass repeatedly superimpose fanfare motifs on the impassioned recitative that pursues its tireless course, first in the cellos and then in the violins. The gnawing sense of anguish grows more and more insistent until the brass enter with another triumphant fanfare. Now at last, in an atmosphere of mystery and hope, the complete Resurrection theme appears in the *pianissimo* cellos. This marks the beginning of the radiant coda in which chorus, soloists and full orchestra come together in a great cry of jubilation.

All that follows—the *Gosser Appell* or Last Trump on the off-stage brass and what Mahler described in his programme as the sound of the nightingale singing over the graves like some 'last tremulous echo of earthly life', followed by the choral entry, marked *ppp*, on the word 'Aufersteh'n' (Rise again) from Klopstock's ode—all this counts among the most memorable moments in the whole symphonic repertory. With the final mezzo-soprano solo ('*O glaube, mein Herz, o glaube*' [Believe, my heart, o believe]), the last remaining doubt is laid to rest and a sense of exalted certainty gradually takes possession of all the performers. The Resurrection theme is heard first in imitation, then in stretto and finally in unison, as the liberating words are taken up by the whole of the chorus. One final time soloists and chorus combine to intone the Resurrection theme on a fervent triple *forte* before leaving the last word to the orchestra, which tirelessly repeats the theme's initial notes in a triumphant peroration on which organ, tam-tams and bells confer an unforgettable splendour.

In this vast finale, one would of course search in vain for the infallible organisation and formal mastery of Mahler's other symphonies. Yet it is hard to imagine a more eloquent conclusion, nor one better suited to one of the most ambitious works ever planned and realised by a composer. The Second Symphony's final apotheosis recalls those radiant glories that can be seen shining above Baroque altars in imperial Austrian churches. It overwhelms and enthralls us, and puts all our doubts to rest.

SYMPHONY NO. 3

Genesis

The composer who writes 'a major work, literally reflecting the whole world, is himself only, as it were, an instrument played by the whole universe'. This famous and oft-quoted phrase could have been uttered only by Mahler, and uttered, moreover, in a rare moment of exaltation such as the one that inspired one of his most imposing, ambitious and vast creations, his Third Symphony. What possessed him to conceive such monumental scores? The answer is not hard to find when we consider that Mahler's operatic activities took up the greater part of his time and energy and that only during the summer months was he able to seek refuge in composition. He had completed only two symphonies when he realised that he was already thirty-four years old and that he had still written very few works in comparison to the great composers of the past. From then on, he felt the need to justify his calling as a creative artist by devoting his summers not only to writing symphonies but to creating veritable symphonic worlds using 'all the technical means' at his disposal. Yet despite appearances, the huge score of the Third Symphony was not born of a desire to pile Pelion upon Ossa but sprang from a tremendous burst of inspiration of a kind that any creative artist—even one of the greatest geniuses—feels only rarely in his life.

Composition

During the early summer of 1895, Mahler returned to the tiny inn at Steinbach on the Attersee and resumed the daily ritual that had first been established two years before. At half past six each morning he would withdraw to the little studio that he had had built on the lakeside and spend the greater part of the day there, often until late in the afternoon. It was here that he wrote the minuet to which he later gave the name *Blumenstück* since it had been inspired by the flower-strewn meadow surrounding the hut. Even by this early date he had already conceived an overall plan that is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious ever designed by a writer of symphonies. Starting from inert matter—rocks and inanimate Nature—he could already glimpse the way in which the vast epic would proceed, one by one, through the stages of evolution—flowers, animals and mankind himself—before rising to universal love, which he imagined as a supremely transcendental force.

This programme passed through several different versions, but it must be stressed that, atypically, Mahler finalised it before embarking on the score. At no point did he ever disown it, even though he later forbade the publication of any explanatory text whenever his works were performed. The general title (which he insisted had nothing to do with Shakespeare's comedy) was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (shortly to become *A Midsummer Morning's Dream*). Later, when he had immersed himself in Nietzsche, he replaced it with a title borrowed from one of the poet-philosopher's books, *My Gay Science* or *The Gay Science*. The opening movement was initially called 'The Arrival of Summer' or 'Pan's Awakening' and, later, 'Procession of Bacchus'. It appears that the initial Allegro, not written until the following year (1896), was not yet preceded by the long introduction in D minor that Mahler was later to say could have been subheaded: 'What the Rocks Tell Me.' The other movements already bore their definitive titles:

2. 'What the Flowers of the Fields Tell Me'
3. 'What the Animals of the Forest Tell Me'
4. 'What Night Tells Me' (later changed to 'What Man Tells Me')
5. 'What the Cuckoo Tells Me' (replaced by 'Morgenglocken' [Morning Bells] and, later, by 'What the Angels Tell Me')
6. 'What Love Tells Me'

To the title of the final movement Mahler later added, by way of a subtitle, 'Father, behold these wounds of mine! Let none of Thy creatures be lost!'. In Mahler's original plan, there was an additional seventh movement, 'What the Child Tells Me', which was none other than the song *Das himmlische Leben*, written three years earlier and subsequently incorporated into the Fourth Symphony.

There were times when so overweeningly arrogant a plan plunged Mahler into despair, for, in contrast to his two preceding symphonies, he no longer sought to depict the world 'from the point of

view of struggling, suffering man', but 'this time went to the very heart of existence, where he must feel in complete awe of the world and of God'. Moreover, he realised that the first movement would last more than half an hour and wondered whether he would be dismissed as a madman or, at the very least, accused of being a megalomaniac bent on outdoing the gigantism of the Second Symphony. Carried along by the flood tide of his inspiration, however, Mahler had no choice but to continue.

The next four movements were written during this first summer of 1895. Although he hesitated briefly over their order, he finally stuck closely to the programme sketched out earlier that year. He was so proud of it that he showed it to all his friends in the course of the following months, with the result that at least eight different versions exist, albeit very similar to one another. For the opening movement, which was to be the longest of the six, Mahler merely noted down a few musical sketches in 1895, deferring the actual composition until the following summer.

When Mahler arrived at Steinbach on 11 June 1896 with the intention of resuming his work of the previous summer, he discovered that, in his haste to leave Hamburg, he had left the sketches of the first movement in a drawer of his desk. Although a friend in Hamburg agreed to forward them to him, he spent an anxious eight days awaiting their arrival, fretting over the time wasted and in a state of constant fear lest the parcel go astray. As always, it proved far more difficult to reimmerge himself in the score than he had envisioned, the transition from his life as a performing artist to that of a creative musician invariably causing him considerable anguish.

At that point, the introduction was still conceived as a separate movement, but it was gradually assuming a new significance: it would no longer depict soulless, lifeless Nature imprisoned beneath the winter ice but the stifling heat of summer, when 'not a breath stirs, all life is suspended, and the sun-drenched air trembles and vibrates. At intervals there come the moans [...] of captive life struggling for release from the clutches of lifeless, rigid Nature'. Enthralled by the 'mystery of Nature', Mahler believed that music alone could 'capture its essence'. To depict Bacchus's procession and its wild cavortings, Mahler thought of hiring a military band, with its repertory of military music of a kind familiar to him from his childhood, the characteristic sounds of which he always evoked so effectively. It may be added in passing that at the end of the nineteenth century when, under the influence of Romanticism, the use of original material had assumed the force of a quasi-religious dogma, it showed unheard-of temerity on a composer's part to introduce the insolent 'banality' of largely unmediated popular music into a symphonic work.

Thanks to the 'diary' kept by Natalie Bauer-Lechner and to Mahler's own correspondence, we are well informed about the genesis of the Third Symphony. A letter to his mistress of the moment, the soprano Anna von Mildenburg, finds him both lucid and elated: 'My symphony will be something the world has never heard before. In it Nature herself acquires a voice and tells secrets so profound that they are perhaps glimpsed only in dreams! I assure you, there are passages where I myself sometimes get an eerie feeling; it seems as though it were not I who composed them.' In spite of all his anxieties, Mahler remained convinced that 'one day the world will take good note of all this', while acknowledging that 'people will need time to crack the nuts I am shaking down from this tree for them'.

The first movement was completed in short score on 11 July 1896—in other words, in less than a month. Soon afterwards, Mahler was visited at Steinbach by his young disciple, Bruno Walter, whom he had previously warned in a letter to expect a work in which his 'savage and brutal nature reveals itself most starkly' and which, on this occasion, 'goes beyond all bounds' with its 'triviality' and 'furious din'. It must be added here that Mahler had been hurt by the almost unanimously hostile reception accorded to his Second Symphony in Berlin the previous December.

That the underlying conception and dominant ideology of the Third Symphony are coloured by pantheistic thought should come as no surprise, since Mahler's attitude toward the human condition, including all questions of life and death, owed more to Eastern philosophies than to the Judaism of his ancestors or the Christianity to which he would shortly be converted. This much is clear to us today from *Das Lied von der Erde*, the final farewell of which is transfigured by the consoling thought of Nature's eternal return each spring. A work so powerful yet so tender and so

overwhelmingly moving in its acceptance of fate's decree expresses far more than any poetic idea, and expresses it, moreover, far better than words ever could: it affirms a literally mystic conviction and provides an answer to the questions on fate and the human condition that haunted Mahler throughout his life.

General plan

In an attempt to justify the unusual length of the opening movement, Mahler divided the Third Symphony into two *Abteilungen* or sections, the first of which comprises the initial Allegro, while the second includes the five movements that follow. Originally he planned to impose a sense of thematic unity on all six movements, and although this plan was not applied to the final version, he nonetheless used several motifs from the opening Allegro in the fourth and sixth movements. A more striking thematic relationship links the fifth movement with the final movement of the Fourth Symphony, in that both are *Wunderhorn* songs sharing several literary and poetic motifs. Moreover, Mahler himself later realised that his 1892 *Wunderhorn* song, *Das himmlische Leben*, was the origin or germ cell of both the Third and Fourth Symphonies.

Analysis

1. *Kräftig. Entschieden* (Powerfully. Decisively). At no time since he had first started to write symphonies did Mahler attempt to disown his links with the past or to abandon sonata form, and the opening movement of the Third Symphony is no exception. It, too, is cast in a form that had obsessed Romantic composers anxious to maintain the Beethovenian ideal. The only difference in this instance is that there are two expositions instead of only one. Stated *fortissimo* on eight horns in unison, the initial march-theme serves, as it were, as a gateway to the rest of the work and plays an essential role throughout the whole of this opening movement. It, too, refers to the past, in this case to the final movement of Brahms's First Symphony (which in turn harks back to the famous theme of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's *Ode To Joy*).

As we have already seen, the most striking feature of this opening movement is the stylistic contrast, not to say disparity, between the two main subject groups. The German philosopher Theodor Adorno argued that there was evidence here of a conscious rebellion on Mahler's part against the notions of 'culture' and 'taste'. The first subject is the music of darkness and chaos, music that is noble, powerful and grandiose in the most Romantic and traditional sense of the term. Embodying motionless, imprisoned Nature, it takes its place in the grand symphonic tradition established by Beethoven and continued by Bruckner, while the second subject, which evokes the Bacchic procession, is distinguished by its blatantly populist character. As such, it belongs to the 'lower' world, the world of brass bands and military music. Yet it should not be thought that such 'popular' material is subjected to any less elaborate treatment than the remaining thematic material: that was not Mahler's method. For him, the most cheerful simplicity, candour and even naivety invariably concealed a musical and even intellectual mechanism that shaped and structured the musical discourse with conscious, unrelenting rigour. While the military music tends to accelerate in the course of the movement, the first subject never departs from its initial tempo or tragic character, even if innumerable variants incessantly affect its outline. In a series of great solo passages that count among the most difficult in the instrument's repertory, the trombone embodies the thunderous voice of the Earth and its elements.

2. *Tempo di Menuetto. Sehr mäßig* (Very moderate). The flowers of the meadow at Steinbach inspired Mahler to write a minuet whose tribute to the past has nothing ironic about it but which dances with an exquisite grace. The gossamer-like delicacy of the orchestration rivals that of Berlioz's *Danse des Sylphes*. Two episodes alternate in symmetrical fashion. Although they are identical in tempo, the second seems faster by virtue of its shorter note-values. In Hamburg Mahler once almost sprained his wrist while instinctively trying to copy out the rapid triplets of this second section at the speed at which they are played.

3. *Comodo. Scherzando. Ohne Hast* (Unhurriedly). Although binary rather than ternary, this movement is the symphony's Scherzo. With the exception of the Trio, all the thematic material is borrowed from the song *Ablösung im Sommer* (Relief of the Summer Guard), in which the spring cuckoo is replaced by the summer nightingale. The listener will have no difficulty in understanding why Mahler chose this evocation of the animal world for his Scherzo. The song's melodic material is

repeatedly transformed and developed with the indispensable element of contrast being provided by one of the most magical moments in any of Mahler's works—namely, the passage for solo posthorn, which is played 'in the distance', i.e., off-stage. Twice the orchestra replies to it, first with a dreamy duet for two horns and later with eight-part writing for gently murmuring violins that seem to hover in their highest register. Although Mahler's contemporaries were scandalised by the alleged 'banality' of this long posthorn solo, which was inspired by memories of the composer's childhood, it delights us today as a moment of unalloyed poetry. No less notable are the great wave of impassioned anguish and 'cry of terror' that ring out towards the end of the movement in a powerful brass fanfare. It is in this way, Mahler suggests, that the animals react to mankind's intrusion upon their world, a phenomenon with devastating consequences of which we are more conscious than ever before.

4. *Sehr langsam* (Very slow). *Misterioso*. Nietzsche's 'Drunken Song' or 'Midnight Song' constitutes an important exception in Mahler's oeuvre at this time, inasmuch as all his other texts were borrowed from the *Wunderhorn* anthology. Its role differs little from that of *Urlicht* in the Second Symphony. In the middle of the night, at the darkest and deepest hour, Life makes Zarathustra feel ashamed at his anguish and doubts and bids him meditate between the twelve strokes of midnight on the secret of the worlds, their profound pain and even more mysterious joy, and on the ardour of that joy that, far from bewailing its ephemeral fragility, yearns for eternity. In the course of this meditation, man discovers the way of truth and accedes to a higher form of existence in the childlike purity of the fifth movement and the mystic contemplation of the sixth. The form here is very free, with intentionally indistinct rhythms and 'weak' degrees and harmonic progressions suggesting night's immobility. Everything revolves around contrasts of timbre and register.

5. *Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck* (Cheerful in tempo and cheeky in expression). The text of 'Es sungen drei Engel' is taken from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, where it appears under the title 'Armer Kinder Bettlerlied' (The Song of the Poor Beggar Children). For this briefest of the work's six movements, Mahler calls on its most elaborate forces, with double chorus of women and children in addition to the female soloist of the previous movement. No doubt there is something paradoxical about this recourse to such ample resources for a movement that is far from being the work's apotheosis. Even more paradoxical is the idea of entrusting a children's choir with the task of imitating morning bells. Yet the radiant luminosity of these fresh-sounding voices gives the scene the bright-toned colours that Mahler desired.

6. *Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfundener* (Slow. Calm. Deeply felt). One would have to look very hard among nineteenth-century symphonies to find another slow movement of such vast dimensions placed, moreover, at the end of the work. A glance at the opening pages of the written score might suggest a simple exercise in polyphonic writing, but no listener can remain insensible to this movement's serenity and grandeur, to its powerful assertion of faith, to its hypnotic motionlessness that is mystical and contemplative rather than meditative. In a movement that renders analysis superfluous, we find Mahler donning the mantle of the legitimate heir of the great Baroque and Classical traditions, a heritage recognisable by its subtle art of variant and variation that untiringly transforms thematic elements which, always familiar, are always different. As usual, there are two alternating subject groups, one in the major, the other in the minor. But the rare moments when anxiety makes itself felt merely serve to underline the tranquil certainty of the movement as a whole.

This hymn to celestial love is wholly bathed in the light of eternity. 'In the Adagio', Mahler told Natalie, 'everything is resolved into peace and being; the Ixion wheel of appearances has at last been brought to a standstill.' The initial fourth is like a distant echo of the fanfare from the symphony's opening bars. Its final apotheosis is undoubtedly the most authentically optimistic of any by a composer so often described as 'morbid' and obsessed with anguish and death. All questions find an answer here, all anguish is assuaged. Almost certainly, this movement would never have been written without the precedent of *Parsifal*, and yet this fact in no way detracts from its greatness. As a final movement, this vast Adagio is a fitting counterpart to the opening movement, and Mahler would certainly have weakened the whole structure by attempting to duplicate the splendours of the choral ending of the Second Symphony. With this hymn of praise to the Creator of the World, conceived as the supreme force of Love, Mahler took the final step on the road to Eternal Light.

First performance

The first performance of the Third Symphony took place in Berlin on 9 March 1897, but it was incomplete, comprising, as it did, only the second, third and sixth movements. The booing did not quite drown the applause, but it was close. The following day the critics of the German capital outdid themselves, writing of the 'tragicomedy' of a composer lacking both imagination and talent, and of a work made up of 'banalities' and 'a thousand reminiscences'. Mahler was described as 'a musical comedian, a practical joker of the worst kind'. But it was the final movement that particularly exasperated critics; they wrote of its 'religious and mystic airs' and dismissed its main theme as 'a formless tapeworm that twisted and wriggled its way through the whole of the piece'.

Five years later, however, in June 1902, the work was performed complete for the first time at Krefeld in the Rhineland, and on this occasion it was the final Adagio whose contemplative power conquered the least prepared and even the most wilfully hostile listeners. In the view of one critic present on that occasion, it was 'the most beautiful slow movement since Beethoven'. The evening's triumph opened the doors to a new era in Mahler's life and career. Once again the audacity of genius had proved its worth.

SYMPHONY NO. 4

In February 1892, after eighteen totally unproductive months, Mahler abandoned his already well-established habit of composing only during the summer months and, even though the Hamburg opera season was still in full swing, began writing music again. To his sister, who had just sent him Arnim's and Brentano's three-volume anthology of poetry, he wrote in a vein of newfound self-confidence: 'I now have the *Wunderhorn* in my hands. With that self-knowledge which is natural to creators, I can add that once again the result will be worthwhile!' Within barely a month Mahler had completed four 'Humoresques' for voice and orchestra that were later to form part of his much larger collection of orchestral *Wunderhorn* songs. What he did not foresee, in spite of the 'self-knowledge' that, as we know, so rarely misled him, was the fate of the fifth 'Humoresque', *Das himmlische Leben*. This song was initially intended to form part of the monumental edifice of the Third Symphony, where it was to appear under the title 'Was mir das Kind erzählt' (What the Child Tells Me), having already furnished part of the melodic material of the symphony's fifth movement. A few years later Mahler became conscious of the exceptional wealth of material that it contained and, for the first time in the history of music, decided to use it as the final movement of another symphony, which likewise was initially described as a 'humoresque'. In this way, *Das himmlische Leben* became the culmination—the 'spire' [verjüngende Spitze] or crowning glory—of the new work, much as the final movements of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Mahler's own Second Symphony became the choral apotheosis of their respective works.

Composition

When he began work on the Fourth Symphony in 1899, Mahler had already spent two years occupying a post that he had coveted for a long time: he was now the admired and autocratic director of the Vienna Court Opera, in which capacity he had in a sense returned to his roots and rediscovered his adopted city. From today's perspective it is not difficult to see the indelible imprint that the Austrian capital left on the Fourth Symphony with its pastoral lyricism and carefree abandon.

Even before setting to work, Mahler had already drawn up a sort of synopsis of the different movements, just as he had done previously for the Third Symphony:

1. *Die Welt als ewige Jetztzeit* (The World as Eternal Present), in G major
2. *Das irdische Leben* (Earthly Life), in E-flat minor
3. *Caritas* (Adagio), in B major
4. *Morgenglocken* (Morning Bells), in F major
5. *Die Welt ohne Schwere* (The World without Gravity), in D major (Scherzo)
6. *Das himmlische Leben* (Heavenly Life)

This plan was to develop considerably: *Morgenglocken* was incorporated into the Third Symphony, *Das irdische Leben* became an independent song and, as such, became part of the collection of orchestral *Wunderhorn* settings, while the Scherzo in D major is undoubtedly identical to the movement that Mahler later inserted into his Fifth Symphony. The Adagio of the present symphony might well have originally been subtitled 'Caritas', but it is in G major, not B major. Not only was it rare for Mahler to change the tonality of a movement once it had been planned, but the same title was to reappear several years later in the initial outline of the Eighth Symphony.

It was in July 1899 that Mahler began work on the actual symphony. Following a series of unfortunate mishaps, he finished up this year at Aussee, a small spa in the Salzkammergut, where he spent a disastrous vacation. Not only was the weather cold and wet, but the villa that he had rented was within earshot of the local bandstand, a proximity that proved a trial for a man as hypersensitive as Mahler was to the slightest external noise. Completely discouraged, he tried to read, and it was only then that musical ideas suddenly began to well up within him. Within the space of only a few days the whole work had taken on very real shape in his imagination.

The final weeks of his vacation were spent in a state of feverish activity. By a cruel irony of fate, his powers of musical invention became increasingly fertile as the fateful hour of his return to Vienna approached. On his many long walks he carried a sketchbook with him so that none of his ideas

should be lost. The final days were a veritable torment: in the course of one of his walks he was suddenly seized by an attack of dizziness at the thought that all the music that was stirring within him would never see the light of day. Before leaving Aussee, he bundled up all his sketches, fully aware that he alone was able to decipher them. On his return to Vienna he placed them in a drawer of his desk and put them out of his mind until the following summer.

The following year, 1900, Mahler and his family decided that, calm and seclusion being indispensable to his creative activities, they would have a house built to which they could return each summer. Accordingly, they chose Maiernigg, a tiny village on the northern edge of the Wörthersee in Carinthia. While waiting for the villa to be completed, Mahler had already had built a studio or *Häuschen* surrounded on all sides by forest. It was here that he planned to compose. But he arrived at Maiernigg completely exhausted by the recent season at the Vienna Court Opera and by the concerts that he had just conducted with the Vienna Philharmonic at the World Exhibition in Paris. Once again, several days were to pass in a state of deep anxiety and total inactivity. He began to complain that he had completely wasted his life by becoming a conductor, citing the example of so many other great composers of the past who, by his age, had already completed the greater part of their oeuvre. It was in a state of deep depression, therefore, that he set to work once again, complaining ceaselessly at the smallest noise—at the birds building their nests in the eaves of his *Häuschen*, at the sounds reaching him from the opposite side of the lake—everything, in short, that he described as the 'barbarity of the outside world'. But as soon as he finally reimmersed himself in the previous year's sketches, he realised to his amazement that throughout his long period of creative inactivity a 'second self' had been working unconsciously and unknown to him. As a result, the work was far more advanced than it had been at the moment he had broken off the previous year, so that the Fourth Symphony could now be completed in record time—only a little over three weeks. Mahler put the finishing touches to the manuscript on 6 August 1900. Beside himself with happiness, he could not stop talking about his work and commenting on it to his closest friends, underlining the unprecedented complexity of the polyphonic writing and the elaborate handling of the development sections.

A programme?

Whereas, in the case of his earlier symphonies, Mahler had provided his listeners with explanatory introductions or at least given titles to their individual movements, he decided on this occasion that the music of the Fourth Symphony can and must be self-sufficient. He had finally realised that the 'programmes' of the symphonic poems by Liszt and his school robbed both music and musician of all freedom and that the programmes he had drawn up for his earlier symphonies had merely bred ambiguities and misunderstandings. Consequently, listeners were not provided with a text of any kind for the Fourth Symphony, with the single exception of the poem set to music in the final movement. But what was Mahler trying to express in his new work? Nothing but the 'uniform blue' of the sky, in all its manifold nuances, the blue that attracts and fascinates human beings, while at the same time unsettling them with its very purity.

In 1901 he described the Adagio, with its 'divinely gay and deeply sad' melody, in the following terms: 'St Ursula herself, the most serious of all the saints, presides with a smile, so gay in this higher sphere. Her smile resembles that on the prone statues of old knights or prelates one sees lying in churches, their hands joined on their bosoms and with the peaceful gentle expressions of men who have gained access to a higher bliss; solemn, blessed peace; serious, gentle gaiety, such is the character of this movement, which also has deeply sad moments, comparable, if you wish, to reminiscences of earthly life, and other moments when gaiety becomes vivacity.' While writing this movement, Mahler sometimes glimpsed the face of his own mother 'smiling through her tears'—the face of a woman who had been able to 'solve and forgive all suffering by love'. At a somewhat later date he compared the work as a whole to a primitive painting with a gold background and described the final movement in particular as follows: 'When man, now full of wonder, asks what all this means, the child answers him with the fourth movement: "This is Heavenly Life".'

Analysis

In contrast to other works and other periods in Mahler's life (one thinks, for example, of the summer of 1904, when he wrote his most anguished music—the final *Kindertotenlieder* and the final movement of the Sixth Symphony—during one of the most outwardly happy periods of his

existence), the Fourth breathes an atmosphere of well-being, relaxation and lyricism in spite of the fact that it was composed at a time of great stress. Two years after his return to Austria, Mahler wrote what was perhaps a song of thanksgiving for his rediscovered homeland, a hymn in praise of Viennese *Gemütlichkeit*: after all, the language of the Fourth Symphony stems directly from the Viennese Classicism of Haydn and Schubert.

1. *Bedächtig. Nicht eilen—Recht gemächlich* (Deliberately. Unhurriedly—Very leisurely). A few bars of introduction in which the sound of flutes and sleighbells predominate (the 'fool's cap and bells', according to Adorno, who compared this opening with the 'once upon a time' of fairytales) lead into the first movement proper, which begins 'as if it did not know how to count to four'. The initial ascending theme, typically Viennese in character, belongs to a larger family of similar melodies in Mahler's works. It is shortly followed by a second theme on the lower strings that is as calm as it is pastoral in nature. But such simplicity is soon belied by a development section in which the different motifs are combined, linked together, transformed and inextricably intertwined or, in the words of Erwin Stein, 'shuffled like a pack of cards'. Time and again they engender new motifs, while at the same time remaining recognisable in their own right, constantly juxtaposed or superimposed in ever new combinations.

2. *In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast* (At a leisurely pace, unhurriedly). A shadow hangs over this Scherzo in ländler rhythm: the shrill sound of a retuned violin (each of its strings is tuned a whole tone higher) invests these pages with a suggestion of parody, although it is clear by the end of the movement that, as Mahler himself explained, 'it wasn't meant so seriously after all'. Originally, Mahler had headed this movement: 'Death strikes up the dance for us; she scrapes her fiddle bizarrely and leads us up to heaven.'

3. *Ruhevoll* (Calm) (Poco Adagio). With the third movement we reach the essence of Mahler's music and, one could almost say, of his soul. No other composer writing in the Beethovenian tradition could have created music so serene, so serious and so profound. In Adorno's words: 'Stripped of all pathos, the long melody discovers the quietude of a happy homeland, relieved of the suffering that is caused by limitation. Its authenticity, which does not need to fear comparisons with Beethoven's, is confirmed by the fact that, after a period in abeyance, a sense of nostalgia wells up again, incorruptibly, in the plaintive strains of the second theme, which transcends the expressive melody of the consequent phrase.' Mahler was right to remark that this movement 'laughs and cries at one and the selfsame time', since the opening theme, motionless and meditative with its passacaglia bass, is followed by a second theme that is openly anguished in character. What follows are two distinct groups of variations on the main theme separated by a return of the second, anguished, theme. The coda, which is in E major, announces the principal motif of the final movement, its sudden modulation unleashing the symphony's only genuinely loud tutti and throwing open the gates of perhaps the only paradise accessible to the living—the naive paradise of childhood and popular imagery.

4. *Sehr behaglich* (Very contentedly). In the *Wunderhorn* poem, *Das himmlische Leben*, Heaven's bucolic pleasures—musical and above all gastronomic—are described and catalogued with a verve, enthusiasm and precision that delighted Mahler. He enjoined the soprano soloist to adopt 'a joyful, childlike expression completely devoid of parody'. His contemporaries found this naivety singularly false and affected, judging it even more scandalous and suspect than everything that had gone before it, not least in the light of the sophistication and above all, the instrumentation of the work. To today's listeners it seems inconceivable that this lovely song, so fresh and pure and so astonishingly rich in melodic invention, should have been so badly received by almost all its early audiences. The luminous, radiant, sublime coda in E major—'heavenly' music if ever there was—leaves us wholly convinced that 'no music on earth can compare with that of the heavenly spheres'. It also teaches us that men like Mahler who, in their lives and art, have willingly accepted all the frustrations, heartbreaks and tragedies of the human condition, as well as its doubts, uncertainties and ambiguities, can still hope to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. What does it matter if this paradise, 'portrayed with the features of a rustic anthropomorphism' (to quote Adorno), seems almost too concrete, too reassuring for us to believe in it totally, as we believe in the mystic resignation of the final movements of the Ninth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*?

Early performances

In writing the Fourth Symphony, Mahler hoped to offer his contemporaries a work that would be both shorter and more accessible than his previous symphonies. He willingly dispensed with vast orchestral forces and, in particular, with trombones, forcing himself, instead, to invest the writing with the clarity, economy and transparency plainly demanded by the subject matter of the symphony. The Fourth Symphony had its first performance in Munich on 25 November 1901 under the composer's own direction. The audience expected another titanic work—a new Second Symphony—from a composer noted for his love of monumentality and could not believe their ears. Such innocence and naivety could only be more posturing on his part, they felt—an additional affectation, if not an example of deliberate mystification. The performance was roundly booed. Shortly afterwards, Felix Weingartner conducted the work in Frankfurt, Nuremberg (where he announced that he was ill and conducted only the final movement), Karlsruhe and Stuttgart. Mahler himself conducted the first performances in Berlin and Vienna. On each occasion he was accused of 'posing insoluble problems', 'amusing himself by using thematic material alien to his nature', 'taking pleasure in shattering the eardrums of his audiences with atrocious and unimaginable cacophonies' and of being incapable of writing anything other than stale and insipid music lacking in style and melody, music that, artificial and hysterical, was a 'medley' of 'symphonic cabaret acts'.

History teaches us that many great composers were similarly reviled by their contemporaries. Of course, it must be admitted that a paradox lay at the heart of the Fourth Symphony, the contrast between the reassuring surface and the complexity of the compositional technique, was bound to be disconcerting. Yet it is difficult to understand how so magisterial a work could have found so few perceptive supporters. If the Fourth Symphony was later to find a solid and stable niche for itself in the international concert repertory before the rest of Mahler's symphonies, it owed that position more to its modest proportions than to the fact that audiences had really understood its true nature or grasped its richness of substance and its mastery of form.

Compared to Mahler's other works, the Fourth Symphony might appear at first sight to be a lightweight intermezzo rather than a work of substance, but such a judgement cannot be sustained in the face of a closer examination of the score. Behind the deliberate simplicity and relatively modest orchestration lie hidden a wealth of invention, a polyphonic density, a concentration of musical ideas and, at the same time, a sovereign technique and almost dizzying complexity and sophistication that are all without precedent in Mahler's oeuvre. Not only did he expend more effort, more time and at least as much love on these forty-five minutes of music than on the ninety minutes of each of the preceding works, but the level of technical success is even more striking, while his evident Neo-Classicism is anything other than a flight into the past. Quite the opposite. For its time, the Fourth Symphony was an avant-garde work, a form of self-discovery for the composer himself, bringing with it as it did an entirely unexpected evolution in his style that led to greater rigour and concentration. In his 'return to Haydn', Mahler certainly borrowed traditional formulas from the past, but he enriched and transformed them constantly, with inexhaustible imagination, never allowing himself to be restricted by such borrowings. Nor has his 'irrational and unreasonable gaiety' anything counterfeit about it: there is nothing of the caricature in it, as is the case with Richard Strauss's *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*, for example. Rather the prevailing mood is that of an affectionate nostalgia for better times, for an 'age of innocence'. It may be added that this barely ironical nostalgia characterises the whole intellectual climate of Vienna in the early years of the twentieth century, finding particularly notable expression in such literary masterpieces as Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and Joseph Roth's *Radetzkymarsch*—yet another reason why the Fourth Symphony remains the most authentically Viennese of all Mahler's works.

SYMPHONY NO. 5

Composition

During the night of 24/25 February 1901, Mahler almost died from an intestinal haemorrhage. The doctors told him the following morning that he would indeed have died if they had not treated him promptly. This no doubt explains the almost exclusively funereal and despairing character of the music he composed in the ensuing summer months—four *Rückert-Lieder*, three *Kindertotenlieder*, and the first movements of the Fifth Symphony. The only exception was the movement he composed first of all, the Scherzo, which can be considered to be another '*Dankgesang eines Genesenen*' (Song of thanks of one restored to health), like the Largo in Beethoven's 15th Quartet. It does indeed reflect one of Mahler's rare moments of optimism and breathes happiness and *joie de vivre* throughout. On the other hand, the first two movements could not be more sombre and desperate, and everything seems to indicate that Mahler at least sketched them out during that same summer. The following year Mahler completed the Symphony with a last 'part' comprising the celebrated Adagietto and the Rondo Finale. He thus chose a structure for the Fifth which he was to use again with only slight differences for his Seventh Symphony. But he would never again repeat what he did here, making the Scherzo the nucleus, the true centre of the work. Nor did he ever compose another Scherzo as vast, complex and polyphonic as this one.

When Mahler returned to Maiernigg at the end of June 1902, he was starting a new life. He was accompanied by his young and radiant wife. Henceforth Alma was to take his sister Just's place as mistress of the house. Alma was musical, she composed, she played the piano well, and was soon to put her musical training to good use, helping her husband by copying the score of the new symphony. Mahler, enclosed in his Häuschen, his studio hidden in the midst of the forest, usually came down only late in the morning to have a swim in the lake before lunch. He did not keep his wife informed of the progress of his creative work but composed in secret for her a song, '*Liebst du um Schönheit*', which is one of the most beautiful declarations of love ever written in music.

On 24 August, three days before returning to Vienna, Mahler wrote to two of his friends to tell them he had completed his work. And now was the time to share with Alma his joy in a completed work. 'Almost ceremoniously' he took her by the arm and led her up to the Häuschen, where he played through the entire symphony on the piano. Alma said she was impressed by the work as a whole but nevertheless criticised the final apotheosis, the brass chorale that she found 'churchlike and uninteresting'. Mahler reminded her of Bruckner and his chorale apotheoses but refrained from revealing to her all the ambiguity of his own chorale, which reproduces note for note one of the melodic fragments thrown off by the clarinet in the first bars of the Rondo.

During the winter, as was his custom, Mahler worked on the details of his score. The final copy was not completed until the autumn of 1903 after his wife had finished hers. But the story of the Fifth had only just begun. True, one of the great German publishing houses, C.F. Peters, immediately offered to publish the symphony, something quite new in Mahler's career as a composer. And the director of the celebrated Gürzenich Konzerte in Cologne decided to make the première of the Fifth the outstanding event of the 1904/5 season. Unfortunately, as soon as the first reading rehearsal with the Vienna Philharmonic was held in September 1904, a month before the performance was due to take place, Mahler began to have doubts about his instrumentation. Alma had confirmed his doubts by telling him: 'But what you've written is a symphony for percussion instruments!' And it was true that for the first time the absolute mastery he had acquired in orchestration had proved inadequate to cope with the development of his style, the problem now being to establish clarity within a polyphonic texture more closely woven than ever before. And so the interminable story of the various versions of the Fifth began. Bruno Walter was later to declare that the advance payment made by Peters to Mahler was entirely spent on paying for the endless stream of revisions and corrections to the score already in print. The last version dates from 1909, but Peters never published it, in spite of the promise made to Mahler shortly before his death. It got into print only in 1964. In fact the director of the firm, Henri Hinrichsen, was completely discouraged by the setbacks the work encountered and the sums of money it had cost him. He even told Arnold Schoenberg that he planned to melt down the plates. Schoenberg's answer is known because it took the form of a long article or lecture on Mahler he wrote in 1912.

The first performance of the Fifth thus took place in Cologne on 18 October 1904. Two years after his first triumph as a composer, with the Third Symphony in 1902, Mahler had at last established his reputation in Germany. And yet neither the public nor the critics seemed prepared to follow him in the new direction his music was now taking. There was much booing mingled with the applause, and the next day the press delivered a harsh verdict. One year later, Robert Hirschfeld, the most outspoken and anti-Mahlerian of the Vienna critics, called Mahler 'the Meyerbeer of the Symphony' after the Vienna première. He admitted that there had been loud applause in the hall but blamed it on the bad taste of the Viennese who, not content with contemplating the 'freaks of nature' now only had ears for 'freaks of the mind'.

A new Style

Nowadays we see things very differently, of course. Everything in the Fifth seems to be the work of a composer who was conscious of his maturity and powers but who nevertheless felt a profound urge to renew himself. Richard Specht saw in the Fifth a first attempt to 'reshape (*gestalten*) the world starting from the individual self'. It was a trend towards abstraction, the abandonment of any references to the past (the *Knaben Wunderhorn*), childhood or paradise (the Fourth), or the great philosophico-religious themes (the Second), or even pantheism (the Third), and also an attempt to find new orchestral language; an enrichment of the palette of sounds; a denser, more coherent and harmonious symphonic form (frequent recurrences of themes, interdependence of the first and second movements forming Part I and of the fourth and fifth movements forming Part III of the Symphony). However, there are still clear thematic links between the Fifth and the Lieder Mahler composed during the same period. With the Fifth Mahler took a decisive step towards a purely orchestral art that he was to practise until the end of his short life, except for the Eighth and the *Lied von der Erde*.

Analysis

Part I

1. *Im gemessenen Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt* (At a measured pace. Sternly. Like a funeral cortège.), 2/2, C-sharp minor. Like the Second Symphony nine years earlier, the Fifth begins with an epic Funeral March. The symphonic hero is 'laid to rest'. But this time the imaginary onlooker (or symphonic commentator, perhaps) does not revolt against fate but faces it with noble and lofty resignation. The feeling expressed—deep, impersonal mourning—is interrupted only by the outburst of the first contrasting episode and the elegiac sweetness of the second. The absence of any real conflict can be seen as the cause—or the consequence of the abandonment of the sonata form. The thematic material continually develops from an ensemble of cells according to a procedure characteristic of Mahlerian composition at this time. Mahler uses progressive tonality throughout: the work begins in C-sharp minor and finishes in D major. The initial Funeral March contains two episodes, which one hesitates to call 'Trios', though they are both clearly intended to provide the expected contrast. Both use themes and motives derived from previous material. The trumpet signal that establishes from the start the character of the movement is a memory from Mahler's childhood, when he heard the distant bugle-calls from the Iglau barracks and watched the military band marching past his parents' house. The signal returns several times like a refrain to link the various episodes or couplets of the March. The real theme (on violins and cellos) belongs to the same world as that of the last *Wunderhorn-Lied*, *Der Tamboursg'ssell*, composed during the same summer of 1901. After its second exposition (violins and woodwinds), it is followed by a new 'consolatory' element (A-flat) in sixths, which has the same dotted rhythm.

In the first of the Trios (*Plötzlich schneller. Leidenschaftlich. Wild* [Suddenly faster. Passionate. Savage], B-flat minor), grief, until now restrained, bursts into rapid, feverish motifs in quavers, supported by syncopated chords on the horns. The reprise of the march theme and the 'consolation' episode restores calm and leads to the second 'Trio'. Its plaintive gentleness contrasts as much as it can with the outburst of the preceding trio, and yet the thematic substance consists only of variants of earlier motifs. Particularly noteworthy is the effect Mahler obtains in the last bars by a new method, the flute echoing the ascending arpeggio of the trumpet, as if the March were fading away into the distance.

2. *Stürmisch bewegt. Mit grosser Vehemenz* (Tempestuously. With great vehemence), Alla breve, A minor. Mahler's letters to his publisher, C.F. Peters, show that he considered this Allegro in sonata form to be the real first movement of the symphony. The beginning of the exposition does not contain a real theme but only a short ostinato on the basses, followed by an agitated motif in ascending and descending scales. The true first subject only appears later, in the first violins. As for the second theme (*Bedeutend langsamer* [Significantly slower]), it is an almost literal quotation from the second 'Trio' in the opening March. The exposition is followed by a broad *Durchführung* in which anguish and rage rise to paroxysms rarely surpassed in the symphonic repertoire. Such is the violence of the feelings unleashed here—revolt, frenzied despair—that one is not surprised when the following reprise makes nonsense of the classical criteria. Just when one expects the return to the first subject, it is the second that reappears in E minor. However, it quickly takes over the main motifs of the first, so that the two subjects, previously so strongly contrasted, end up merging together. At the end of the reprise the ascending 'optimistic' elements seem to gain the upper hand. The brasses strike up a hymn of triumph in chorale form. But this victory is short-lived, and the movement ends in gloom, anguish and mystery. 'The old tempest dies away to an echoing whimper', as Theodor Adorno so aptly put it.

Part II

Scherzo: *Kräftig, nicht zu schnell* [Vigorously, not too fast], 3/4, D major. The change in tone is abrupt between the despair of the Allegro and the radiant good humour of the Scherzo. This is Mahler's longest movement (819 bars) and one of the only movements in which there is no element that could be interpreted as ironic or parodic. Everything about this Scherzo is surprising, not only its gigantic proportions but also its thematic elaboration, which is as complex as that of a sonata movement. The first horn 'obligato', which plays a solo role in most of the movement, states the main subject of the Ländler—a highly stylized Ländler of course, since its rhythm is contradicted by a counter and asymmetrical melody that also runs counter to the ternary rhythm. The secondary episode is a *fugato* in quavers, whose presence in a dance movement is, to say the least, unusual. Nevertheless, it is to play an essential role in the developments to come.

The gracefully hesitating rhythm of the first Trio (*etwas ruhiger*, [somewhat calmer]) is more suggestive of a city dweller's waltz than a countryman's Ländler. This first Trio is separated from the second by a reprise of the Scherzo and a first development of the fugato episode. The sound of the horns, romantic instruments *par excellence*, defines the mood of the second Trio that carries us from the dance floor to the enchanted world of nature. Later, however, the various rhythmic and melodic elements of the three different episodes are closely intertwined and developed, often simultaneously. They become inextricably mixed in the final coda. The Viennese waltz has just reached its climax when it is interrupted with almost Beethovenian abruptness by a double return of the initial motif of the Scherzo.

Part III

1. *Adagietto. Sehr langsam* [very slow], 4/4, F major. After such a display of joie de vivre it would have been inconceivable to end the symphony in a tragic mood, and even more so to follow the Scherzo immediately with another movement of the same character. A contrast had to be provided, and that is the principal raison d'être for the celebrated Adagietto, a 'song without words' played on the strings and discreetly accompanied by the harp. The central episode develops and amplifies the initial theme, passing through a wide range of different keys before being restated in a much modified form. The mood is one of gentle meditation, as in the Lied *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen* which is so close in thematic content. Should this little movement be taken as another one of Mahler's messages of love for Alma, as Willem Mengelberg has claimed? The testimony of a conductor who was Mahler's close friend and devoted admirers cannot be easily dismissed, yet one wonders why Alma who, in later life, took pride in her 'tropes', in the declarations of love she had received from the four great men in her life, never mentioned the Adagietto among them.

Be that as it may, those who would condemn the immediate appeal of this gentle *rêverie* as too facile would be well advised to examine the score and note its exquisite craftsmanship; to note for example the way in which Mahler creates an effect of weightlessness by omitting the bass note of the chord, i.e. the tonic, in the first two bars; or the effect of suspension of time obtained at the end of the movement by retardations in each melodic line, as if each note were reluctant to take its

place within the perfect chord. Six years later this was exactly the device Mahler was to use again to suggest eternity at the end of the *Lied von der Erde*.

2. Rondo Finale: *Allegro giocoso*, 2/2, D major. The introduction on the woodwinds unfolds like a carefree, humorous improvisation. But the various motifs, seemingly tossed out by chance, all play an essential role in later developments. One of them is borrowed literally from a *Wunderhorn Lied* of 1896, *Lob des hohen Verstandes* (In praise of high intelligence), a satirical account of a singing contest between a cuckoo and a nightingale at the end of which the donkey, the highly expert judge, condemns, Beckmesser-like, the nightingale's song as too complicated and awards the prize to the cuckoo. Mahler's original title for this Lied was: 'In praise of criticism'. In quoting it here, he was perhaps thinking of the 'infernal judges' of the press who would be sure, like the donkey, to condemn the symphony. Such a faithful self-quotation could hardly have been unintentional.

The first subject of the Rondo proper descends directly from that of the Finale of Beethoven's Second Symphony. It is Beethoven too who inspired the general form—half sonata, half rondo—and Mahler also took from him the idea of introducing fugal elements. The first of these *fugatos* comes immediately after the exposition of the main theme. As counter-subject Mahler uses the motif that the clarinet had so casually thrown off in the introduction. The *Wunderhorn* theme is then used as material for a new *grazioso* episode. But this peters out after a few bars and is taken over by a reprise of the first subject, complete with its introductory divertissement. The following episode, this time developed at length, combines several familiar motifs but introduces a new element, *grazioso*, on the strings, which is soon discovered to be a complete, varied restatement, in quick tempo, of the central development of the Adagietto! The second re-exposition of the main section (rhythmically varied this time) is followed by another fugato still more developed than the previous one and embellished with echoes of the Adagietto. After a false reprise of the main subject (in A-flat, on the low strings), the third development, based on the melody of the Adagietto, gradually gathers speed and ends in whirling scales, leading to the brass chorale to which Alma had objected in 1902. It is partly related to the one in the second movement but is in fact based on the carefree little melody played by the clarinet in the Introduction, which now symbolises the final victory of the forces of life and creation. This hymn of victory only confirms the feeling of euphoria developed from the start by the abundance of themes and motifs, a magic kaleidoscope of sounds in which melodic fragments and cells keep recurring, always familiar and recognisable as themselves, and yet always new.

Theodor Adorno rightly observes that the bars that follow the chorale and bring the movement to a close have a suggestion of parody and distortion about them, a 'whiff of sulphur'. In this, his first brilliant Finale, Mahler seems to be attempting to revive the vigour of classical forms and techniques. Yet a feeling of uneasiness, a slight flavour of irony shows through the shining surface. In *Die Meistersinger*, Wagner had already demonstrated how a 'learned' style could lend itself to caricature, how narrow the margin is between the pedant and the clown. Does this busy Rondo perhaps suggest the bustle of everyday life as a destructive force for the artist whom it diverts from his creative mission?

Obviously, whichever way one interprets it, the final paean of triumph at the end of the Fifth is ambiguous. Could it have been otherwise with a composer who never ceased to express the uncertainty and doubt, the anguish, the ambiguity that marked his epoch and that still hangs over ours? This ambiguity is indeed one of the main subterranean streams that feed his art, something that gives it its inexhaustible richness and perpetual relevance. If Mahler had concluded with a simple, straightforward apotheosis, he would not be challenging us as he never ceases to do. This is no doubt why his music has lost none of its fascination, its capacity to question, stimulate and surprise.

SYMPHONY NO. 6

Having completed his Fourth Symphony, Mahler set off in a new direction, renouncing not only the human voice (and, with it, words) but also 'programmes'. As a result, we often have to rely on the most slender evidence to unravel the sense or 'message' of the three instrumental symphonies that followed. The journey taken by the imaginary hero of the Fifth had seemed relatively straightforward, leading, as it does, from the opening Funeral March to the joyful Rondo-Finale: a case, quite clearly, of *per aspera ad astra*. In the Sixth Symphony, by contrast, the grim determination and aggression of the opening movement are merely emphasised in the final Allegro moderato which, in spite of everything, ends on a note of defeat, the bitterness of which is altogether unalloyed. Such defeatism and bitterness are all the more surprising since there was nothing in Mahler's life at this time that appears to justify such dark pessimism.

Composition

Mahler began work on the Sixth Symphony in 1903 at a time when he had finally succeeded in imposing his authority and original ideas on the Vienna Court Opera, not least through what was to prove to be a longstanding collaboration with the great painter and designer Alfred Roller. Mahler was slowly beginning to gain recognition as a composer and in C.F. Peters had found one of the leading publishers in Germany to sell and market his new work, the Fifth Symphony. Unfortunately, very little information is available on the actual composition of the Sixth Symphony since, unlike Natalie Bauer-Lechner, Alma Mahler was never a particularly scrupulous observer of her husband's creative life. Through cross-checking, however, it can be established that Mahler—newly married and the father of a little daughter—arrived at Maiernigg on 10 June 1903 and set to work without delay. Alma recalls that he returned from his *Häuschen* one day and told her that he had tried to evoke her in a theme. 'Whether I've succeeded, I don't know; but you'll have to put up with it'. The theme in question is one of the few 'positive' gestures in the work: it is the second subject of the opening movement, an ascending and descending line in the major, energetic and willful, over which Mahler has written the word 'Schwungvoll' (con brio) in the full score. Whenever he had completed a section of his work, Mahler habitually felt the need to distance himself from it, and his work on the Sixth Symphony was no exception: on 20 July he left Maiernigg for a short train journey to the Dolomites, taking his bicycle with him. Five weeks later, when he returned to Vienna, he had already completed the two middle movements in short score and had undoubtedly sketched the first.

At the beginning of the following summer (1904), Alma's arrival in Maiernigg was delayed by more than two weeks because she had still not recovered from the birth of her second daughter, Anna (known as 'Gucki'). Throughout the month of June, heaven and earth seemed to conspire to prevent Mahler from resuming work on the score. The weather on the Wörthersee was appalling during these long days of solitude and forced inactivity: the sky was overcast, with frequent storms and torrential rain. Mahler read Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Tolstoy's grim *Confessions*. He desultorily played Brahms and Bruckner at the piano, but all the music he looked at left him disillusioned. It was his own lack of creativity, however, that weighed most heavily on him. When he finally returned to his work, it was to complete the *Kindertotenlieder*. Time passed, and the Sixth Symphony had still not advanced by a single bar, consciously at least. The anxious feeling that so often assailed him—namely, that the well-spring of his art had run dry—continued to obsess him, although he attempted to 'pick up the pieces of his inner self'. By early July, the weather had improved, but suddenly the heat became unbearable. Incapable of enduring it a moment longer, Mahler rewarded himself for the completion of his song cycle and treated himself to a lightning tour of the Dolomites to last until Alma arrived. And it was among the ragged peaks of the Sextener Dolomiten around Sesto that he finally found the inner drive and inspiration that allowed him to finish his new symphony.

By the end of August, when he was preparing to return to Vienna, Mahler was able to announce the completion of the Sixth Symphony to his friends Guido Adler and Bruno Walter. However brief his remarks, they were heavy with evident pride. Yet he had no illusions about the fate that lay in store for his latest symphony, which he knew would have just as much difficulty as its predecessors in establishing a place for itself in the repertory: 'My Sixth will pose conundrums that only a generation that has absorbed and digested my first five symphonies may hope to solve'. Immediately after completing it, he took Alma's arm and solemnly led her to his *Häuschen* to play

the work through for her. By her own admission she was moved to the very depths of her being by the score: 'The Sixth is the most profoundly personal of his works. [...] Not one of them came so directly from his inmost heart as this'.

A young female friend of Alma's has left a highly detailed account of life at Maiernigg during the summer of 1904. Within his family circle, Mahler played Bach at the piano, quoted Goethe and went boating on the lake. To all appearances this was the most peaceful of all the summers that he spent in Carinthia. How, then, can we explain the fact that it was at precisely this time that he wrote the most tragic of all his works? According to Alma, he later recognised in the three hammer blows of the final movement a premonition of the three blows of fate that were to fall on him in 1907: the death of his elder daughter, the diagnosis of a potentially dangerous heart condition and his departure from Vienna.

Be that as it may, none of these catastrophes had struck by May 1906 when Mahler travelled to Essen in the Ruhr to conduct the first performance of his new symphony at the annual festival of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein. Yet Alma describes his almost pathological state during the rehearsals, his anxiousness, nervousness, instability and the doubts that never ceased to beset and torment him. All the young musicians in his entourage did what they could to rally round and to offer him their advice and support during the rehearsal period. Even more than usual, he kept on polishing and correcting details of the orchestration. If we believe Alma, he 'was so afraid that his agitation might get the better of him that out of shame and anxiety he did not conduct the symphony well'. After the concert, the Dutch conductor Willem Mengelberg expressed concern about his state of health. All in all, it seems as though the fateful work terrified even its creator.

Form

In comparison to that of its predecessors, the four-movement form of the Sixth Symphony might appear to represent a return to Classical norms. The Fifth, after all, had been in five movements, the Third in six. On closer inspection, however, it becomes clear that the work surpasses all that Mahler had previously written in terms of its boldness and the dimensions of its final movement. One of the main questions that Mahler asked himself during the rehearsals regarded the order of the two middle movements. Initially, the order was Allegro, Scherzo, Andante and Finale. This is the order generally adopted today. It was, however, at Essen that Mahler probably allowed himself to be influenced by a number of his friends who pointed out the striking similarity between the opening of the Scherzo and that of the initial Allegro, and he was persuaded, therefore, to place the Andante in second position, an order he retained in Munich at the time of the work's second performance in November 1906. But in the course of rehearsals for the Viennese première a few weeks later in January 1907, he decided to revert to the original order and later asked his friend Willem Mengelberg to consider this order definitive. These hesitations and reversals on numerous points of detail and even on a matter as important as the order of the movements are confirmed by Mahler's contemporaries. As was so often the case, Mahler felt while writing the Sixth Symphony that he was the instrument of a power greater than himself. On this occasion, however, that power was mysterious, tragic and implacable, plunging him into a state of insurmountable anguish.

A programme after all?

What is this power with which Mahler's symphonic heroes are forced to contend and to which they often succumb, as is the case at the end of the Sixth Symphony? It is a struggle that Mahler himself had to face, as he made clear in a striking remark when, after the final rehearsal, one of his friends asked him: 'But how can someone who is so good express so much cruelty and harshness in his work?' To which he replied: 'They are the cruelties I've suffered and the pains I've felt!' One thinks in the first instance of the enemy that Mahler fought ceaselessly throughout his life, the hostile and often overwhelming force of mediocrity, inertia, habit, routine and what he called 'der Alltag'—the daily round. But in Mahler's life there was also a genuine drama, namely, that of his failed relationship with Alma, the beautiful and lively woman whom he had resolved to marry—perhaps unduly hastily—some three years earlier. At no point in their married life did Alma share her husband's aspirations. Many years later she vented all the rancour and frustration that had been building up inside her, and in her two books of reminiscences even went so far as to reproach him for having wanted to stifle every vital spark within her.

Plan: cyclical unity

Every work of art worthy of the name must satisfy two contradictory demands: unity and diversity. In his Sixth Symphony, Mahler meets both these requirements by adopting solutions as magisterial as they are novel. Never before had he taken such pains to create a network of cyclical relationships between the different movements and to draw on what was in fact a very limited reservoir of thematic cells in order to produce an infinite number of themes and motifs. In writing the Sixth he was keen, he said, 'to obtain a maximum of different characters from a minimum of original materials'.

From the outset Mahler defines the work's negative, pessimistic character with a harmonic leitmotif that reverses the traditional order of modes, prefacing the minor with a major mode. This order is repeated on numerous occasions, almost always accompanied by another, rhythmic, leitmotif.

Instrumentation

It is worth adding a few words about the orchestral resources that Mahler demanded for the Sixth Symphony. Whereas the woodwind department is relatively normal, the brass is notably larger, with eight horns, six trumpets, four trombones and a tuba. But it is the percussion family that includes the most unusual additions: it includes two sets of timpani, a bass drum, a triangle, a switch [rute], a tam-tam and, for the first time in any of Mahler's works, cowbells and two or more deep bells of indeterminate pitch. Also appearing for the first time in any of his symphonies are a celesta (a member of the metallophone family of instruments with metal plates suspended over resonating boxes and struck by means of hammers activated by a keyboard), a xylophone and the famous hammer, whose strokes were to be 'short, mighty but dull in resonance, with a non-metallic character, like the stroke of an axe'. Mahler initially experimented with a huge wooden chest, stretched with hide, that he had made to his own specifications. But the result was inconclusive and he was forced to abandon it. In the concert hall, these hammer blows, about which so much ink has flowed, are very rarely audible, and it seems probable that Mahler would have welcomed an electronically produced sound here. In one of the final versions of the score, he suppressed the third hammer blow, a move that merely serves to underline the symbolic importance that he attached to these blows.

Analysis

1. *Allegro energico, ma non troppo*. A model of Classical balance, the opening Allegro is cast in first-movement sonata form with an exposition involving the traditional repeat. Here Mahler takes his definitive leave of the world of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* that could still be glimpsed in certain episodes of the Fifth Symphony. There is no longer any trace here of the earlier realm of legends and childhood memories, which is replaced by a world that is cruel and almost willfully unappealing: angular, sometimes even unattractive themes characterised by wide intervals; ostinato rhythms and a tense, strained and anguished atmosphere. The hero of the symphony departs for war to an energetic march rhythm articulated on a percussion instrument borrowed from the world of military music, the side drum. A double exposition of the principal subject is followed by a transitional episode on the woodwind, a bridge passage in long note-values in the form of a chorale divested of its normal contents and imbued, instead, with a sort of hollow formalism and bizarre harmonies. Unlike the songs of triumph and faith that play an essential role in Bruckner's symphonies, this is a 'negative' chorale and, as such, one of the symphony's most striking innovations. As Theodor Adorno has shown, it leads nowhere and prepares for nothing—certainly not for the 'Alma' theme, which enters in a moment as a veritable intrusion.

This second thematic element is one of a large family of ascending (and, hence, optimistic) motifs that had earlier produced the main themes of the final movements of the First and Second Symphonies. But it seems to embody not so much the reality as the *idea* that Mahler had (or wanted to have) of Alma: it is neither the charm nor the beauty of his young wife that he evokes here but a willful, if not forced, optimism. No doubt Mahler had already guessed that Alma would not always perform the ideal role of sister in arms and companion in which he had cast her in a moment of ingenuousness. Moreover, a number of elements of the initial subject are soon combined with this second theme, a combination that casts doubt on its 'positive' nature.

A section of the development deserves particular attention, the moment of idyllic calm in which the woodwind and brass exchange fragments and variants of Alma's theme against a background of violin tremolandi. Here for the first time we hear the sound of cowbells, a symbol of contented isolation far removed from the turmoil of human existence. The movement ends in A major, but it is a tonality that sounds bombastic rather than genuinely triumphant, as if the 'hero' wanted to convince himself that he had triumphed, without really believing in his own victory.

2. *Scherzo. Wuchtig* (Weighty). For this movement, Alma provided a 'key' that could scarcely be less convincing: it represented, she claimed, 'the arhythmic games of the two little children, tottering in zigzags over the sand' in the garden at Maiernigg. But in 1903, when these two middle movements were written, Anna had not yet been born and Putzi was no more than eight or nine months old. One is tempted, rather, to hear in this Scherzo a neo-medieval Dance of Death of the kind introduced by the 'Funeral March in Callot's Manner' of the First Symphony. I say 'dance', but it must be admitted that this eerie Scherzo never really dances, or, rather, it dances with a limp, since the triple rhythm is incessantly contradicted by accents placed on the weak beat in each bar. The general atmosphere is gloomy and grimacing, a mood to which the orchestration contributes with its use of instruments such as the piccolo, E-flat clarinet and xylophone notable for their shrill sonorities. With its changes of time signature, rhythmic instability and formal and old-fashioned counterpoint, the Trio is no less disquieting. Grotesque marionettes dressed in fusty clothes seem to perform an ungainly dance with an almost pathetic clumsiness.

3. *Andante moderato*. It is left to the Andante to introduce a note of contrast into the symphony's cruel and hostile world. Indeed, its expansive lyricism makes it Mahler's only authentic symphonic Andante, with the exception of that in the Fourth. Its opening theme, often accused of 'banality' by Mahler's contemporaries, was analysed in detail by Arnold Schoenberg, who underlined its asymmetries and ellipses and, above all, the fact that it is never restated in its original form. Melodically speaking, it still belongs to the world of the *Kindertotenlieder* but without the atmosphere of mourning. Two contrasting episodes follow, the first on the strings, the second in the minor on the winds, but they are soon combined and even confused. Triplets that turn back on themselves, trilling birdsong and cowbells evoke the blissful calm of nature from which Mahler drew the greater part of his creative energies.

4. *Finale: Sostenuto; Allegro moderato; Schwer* (Heavy); Marcato; Allegro energico. With the exception of Part II of the Eighth Symphony, where the form is prescribed by the text (the final scene from Goethe's *Faust*), this epic finale is the longest of Mahler's movements. An immense, forty-minute musical 'novel' whose elements, as always, are in a state of perpetual evolution by virtue of a principle defined by Adorno as 'the irreversibility of time', this movement is structured around a fourfold repetition of its slow introduction.

With the opening bars of this introduction, the blackest of nights envelops us, a chaos suggestive of the end of the world. Fragments of themes shoot up through the darkness, only to fall away again. After a great initial 'cry' that rises to the violins' highest register before plunging down to the cellos' lowest notes, we hear, in succession, the symphony's double leitmotif, harmonic and rhythmic; an ascending octave-motif on the tuba recalling the opening movement's initial theme, followed by an arpeggiated motif borrowed from the Scherzo and, finally, an anticipation of the second theme, which is the only optimistic element in this final movement. But the most striking element in this introduction is undoubtedly the episode marked 'schwer' on the winds, another chorale-like passage but even more paradoxical and negative than that of the opening movement. What does it symbolise? The resistance of matter? Implacable destiny from which none of us can escape? Death? Whatever the answer, its immobility, rigidity and formalism, together with its low-pitched timbre, invest it with a profoundly hostile character.

The principal theme of the Allegro is made up of all the elements that have been previously introduced. In the first reprise of the introduction, the initial 'cry' is inverted (descending, then ascending, and differently harmonised), in which form it introduces the development section, a section that defies all attempts at succinct analysis. In its dimensions it is entirely at one with the rest of the work, extending, as it does, to almost 300 bars out of a total of 822. Two hammer blows separate the main sections of this epic struggle. In the recapitulation, which is considerably foreshortened, the order of the two principal thematic elements is reversed, the major preceding the minor as in the symphony's principal leitmotif.

A final variant of the opening 'cry', accompanied in its final bars by both the major-minor and the obsessive, rhythmic leitmotifs, heralds the final catastrophe. No other piece of music approaches this coda for its sense of devastation and desolation. A slowed-down version of the ascending-octave motif is passed to and fro among the orchestra's lowest instruments in a sort of sombre threnody or stricken dirge. The movement ends with a final reprise of the octave motif, this time on the lowest strings. It is brutally interrupted by a fortissimo minor chord (not preceded on this occasion by the major) that is underpinned by the rhythmic leitmotif as it gradually dies away. All that remains is despair, the dark night of the soul and the sense of defeat summed up by this haunting rhythm.

Is there any need to speculate further on the meaning of an ending described by Adorno as 'all's ill that ends ill'? For my own part, I think that all human beings pass through such moments of absolute despair and that Mahler is just as much himself here as he is in the triumphant tones of the Eighth Symphony. As a creative artist he was bound to explore the dark and desolate landscapes of the Sixth before discovering, in his subsequent works, other pathways leading to other horizons. The blackness of the Sixth Symphony was an indispensable stage in his evolution that would lead him to the radiant optimism of the Eighth and later and entirely naturally, to the 'azure horizons' and luminous vistas that, at the end of *Das Lied von der Erde*, open to eternity.

SYMPHONY NO. 7

Of the three instrumental symphonies that constitute a trilogy between the vocal Fourth and the choral Eighth, the Seventh represents a special or extreme case, inasmuch as it marks the furthest point to which Mahler advanced on the road to musical modernism. At first sight, it is hard to discover a single common feature or unity of intent that could justify his bringing together five such disparate movements. But Mahler was never the man to shy away from excess, and in the case of the Seventh Symphony we find him reaching the furthest point in his development with an opening movement that is, harmonically at least, the most 'modern' of any he wrote; a second movement (the first *Nachtmusik*) that mixes together all manner of reminiscences and symbols in its evocation of a Romantic past; the most demonic and terrifying of all his Scherzos; the most *faux naïf* of all his symphonic idylls (the second *Nachtmusik*) and, finally, the most insane, most 'deviant' and most provocative of all his final movements.

Composition

If the Seventh Symphony is less unified than the others, it is perhaps because the secondary movements—the two *Nachtmusiken*—were written before the other three. In 1904 Mahler set himself the task of completing the Sixth Symphony during his summer vacation, but, as so often happened when he left Vienna and his life as a performing musician, he spent several days in utter torment searching for the inspiration he needed. Despairing of himself and his destiny as a creative artist, he abandoned his desk and, as he usually did on such occasions, set off on a tour of the Southern Tyrol, taking in Toblach, from which he took the road leading up to the Lake of Misurina. It may have been here, while he was searching in vain for the inspiration for his final movement, that he wrote down the themes for his two nocturnes among the countless other 'parasitical' ideas that he made a habit of jotting down in a small notebook if they were not to be used in the work currently in hand. We know very little about the work that he did during the summer of 1904, except that by the end of August he had not only completed the Sixth Symphony but also sketched out the whole of the two *Nachtmusiken*. It may be mentioned in passing that Mahler never again worked simultaneously on two different pieces.

In 1905 Mahler returned to Maiernigg after another exhausting season at the Vienna Court Opera, and once again there followed ten days of torment, from 15 to 25 June, during which he failed to find the necessary inspiration for the symphony's remaining movements. The first proved particularly intractable. Another excursion to the Southern Tyrol seemed to be called for, and Mahler spent two and a half hours walking round the shores of one of the region's lakes. He was in a foul temper, not only because of an incessant migraine but also because it was Corpus Christi and the inn where he was staying was full to overflowing with noisy guests. For once, the overwhelming beauty of the surrounding countryside failed to lift his depression: 'I plagued myself for two weeks until I sank into gloom, as you well remember', he wrote to Alma several years later, 'then I tore off to the Dolomites. There I was led the same dance, and at last gave it up and returned home, convinced that the whole summer was lost. You were not at Krumpendorf to meet me, because I had not let you know the time of my arrival. I got into the boat to be rowed across. At the first stroke of the oars the theme (or rather the rhythm and character) of the introduction to the first movement came into my head—and in four weeks the first, third and fifth movements were done'.

In this invaluable letter of 8 June 1910, Mahler was anxious to remind his wife that he was incapable of writing music to order. In 1905 it had been the boatsman's magic oarstroke that had exorcised his annual curse and allowed him to return to the Seventh Symphony. By 15 August he was able to announce (in Latin) to his friend Guido Adler the completion of the work. Four days later Richard Strauss received a card to the same effect. As for the publication and first performance, he declared that he would wait as long as was necessary, but in the end the wait was dictated not so much by Mahler's own resolve as by outside circumstances. The first performance of the Sixth Symphony was even less well received than that of the Fifth, with the result that, with only weeks to go before the planned première of the Seventh in September 1908, Mahler was still without a publisher. As a result, he had to resign himself to having the orchestral parts copied at his own expense and to make appeals to publishers that were deeply humiliating for a composer of his age and reputation. It was the small Leipzig firm of Lauterbach & Kuhn (which was soon to be bought up by the Berlin publisher Bote & Bock) that finally accepted his proposal, with the result that the full score was published during the course of 1909.

First performance

The choice of Prague and the turbulent setting of an exhibition celebrating the emperor's diamond jubilee might have seemed somewhat risky for the first performance of his new symphony, but Mahler had no reason to regret it, such was the zeal of the members of the orchestra and the inexhaustible enthusiasm of the Czech and German musicians who had gathered in Prague for the occasion. Moreover, he was granted almost two weeks of rehearsals, a privilege he would almost certainly never have enjoyed elsewhere. Of his numerous friends and disciples who were present—suffice to mention only Bruno Walter, Artur Bodanzky, Otto Klemperer, Ossip Gabrilovich, Alexander von Zemlinsky, Alban Berg, Oskar Fried and Klaus Pringsheim—none would ever forget these days of collaborative effort. Most agreed that the rehearsals passed off in a harmonious atmosphere but that the applause at the actual performance was respectful rather than warm. With few exceptions, the Czech press (like their Austrian counterparts some time later) expressed themselves in polite generalities that ill-concealed their lack of appreciation. Of course, Mahler was no longer accused of creative impotence, but there was still a sense of astonishment that so serious a work could contain so much that was 'banal' and obviously popular in origin. Only the second *Nachtmusik* elicited a more enthusiastic response. Many years would pass before the Seventh Symphony was properly accepted, and even today it remains the composer's least popular symphony.

A programme?

We have very little evidence at our disposal to help us hazard a guess at the Seventh's 'inner programme'. First and foremost, of course, there is the title *Nachtmusik* that Mahler used for the second and fourth movements, a title that, at first sight, seems to suggest a period remote from our own, when music was often performed in the open air. Their common title notwithstanding, the two movements are in fact utterly dissimilar. The first on its own is something of a paradox since, although its military character is very pronounced, it is difficult to imagine a battalion driving back night's dusky cohorts with a military band at its head. Two of Mahler's Dutch friends, Willem Mengelberg and Alfons Diepenbrock, confirmed that it was Rembrandt's celebrated *Night Watch* (a work that Mahler had admired when he saw it in the Rijksmuseum) that inspired this nocturne, but he later insisted that he had merely imagined a 'patrol' advancing through a 'fantastical chiaroscuro'. References to the military world of Mahler's childhood and to *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* are especially striking here, so that one might well consider this movement a *Wunderhorn* song without words.

In the case of the second *Nachtmusik*, Alma reveals that, while he was writing it, Mahler was haunted by the 'murmuring springs' of Eichendorff's poems and by the poet's 'German Romanticism'. As for the opening movement, Mengelberg claims to have heard Mahler expounding on the subject at the time of the rehearsals in Amsterdam: it expressed 'violent, self-opinionated, brutal and tyrannical force', 'a tragic night without stars or moonlight' and ruled by 'the power of darkness'. According to Mengelberg, the tenor horn in the introduction proclaims: 'I'm master here! I'll impose my will!'

Structure and musical language

However disparate the individual movements may seem, the symphony's overall structure is nonetheless striking in its symmetry, a symmetry that was to be repeated, with minor modifications, in both *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Tenth Symphony. In broad outline, it consists of two fast movements (a sonata and a rondo) framing three movements that are freer in form. As noted at the outset, Mahler uses a more modern musical language in the Seventh Symphony than in any of his earlier works, with implacable dissonances, sudden modulations, chord progressions exploring remote tonalities and a surfeit of notes which, at odds with harmonic theory, can nonetheless be justified in terms of the individual voice-leading.

Analysis

1. *Langsam* [Slow]. Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo, 4/4, B minor / E minor. With the introduction we are immediately drawn into an atmosphere of darkness and mystery. Three sections follow: an

initial march of almost funerary grandeur (I); a second march (I1), quicker and lighter, on winds supported by pizzicato strings, that will play an essential role in the Allegro and, third, a much-modified repeat of the opening section introduced by a new version of the initial theme on the trombones. The instrumental solo that launches the work is entrusted to a tenor horn (a baritone in English), a member of the saxhorn family with a penetrating timbre. A sense of malaise and instability is engendered from the outset by the use of the unusual interval of a diminished fifth and by the fact that the theme is accented in such a way that the strong beat twice falls on a sustained note. As already mentioned, the ominous accompanying rhythm was suggested to Mahler by the oars of a boat on the Wörthersee, but it also recalls one of the most famous episodes in any of Verdi's operas, the 'Miserere' from *Il trovatore*. According to Mengelberg, this introduction describes night, death and the shadowy forces with which the swaggering first subject will shortly have to contend. The least that can be said is that this swagger is short-lived: the lyrical episodes, and the second subject in particular, are so numerous and extensive that one ultimately has the impression of being confronted not by a symphonic Allegro but by a slow movement with parenthetical interpolations at a faster tempo.

Closely related to the theme of the introduction, the Allegro's initial subject (A) owes its headstrong and somewhat misshapen character to its successions of melodic fourths, which anticipate those of Schoenberg's Chamber Symphony and the future collapse of the tonal system. The second subject (B) is in C major, a long, ecstatic melody still reminiscent of the world of the *Kindertotenlieder* and the Andante from the Sixth Symphony while also related to the extended family of ascending themes that throughout Mahler's works symbolise his metaphysical optimism. The little march from the introduction (I1) now serves as a transition to the development section. Following a varied recapitulation of the introduction's swaggering theme, the latter gradually allows itself to be suborned by the expansive lyricism of the second subject (B). The tempo quickens, only to give way once more to a long and dreamily motionless episode, the chorale motif of which, heard on the strings and lower woodwind, is none other than a new version of I1. Birdsong and distant fanfares reply. The second subject, B, now ushers in a new sense of ecstasy, bringing with it a return of the introduction's tempo and rhythm and itself reappearing before long. In view of the crucial role played by this second subject within the development section, one could perhaps expect to find it banished from the reexposition, but this is not the case. It now attains to new heights of lyricism, rising to dizzying altitudes at the very top of the instruments' registers.

2. *Nachtmusik*. Allegro moderato. Molto moderato (Andante), 4/4, C minor / major. Following a slightly quicker introduction, the movement itself maintains a stability of tempo rare in Mahler's music. A spatial effect is created by having the second of two horns playing with a mute and recalls the dialogue of the cor anglais and off-stage oboe at the beginning of the 'Scène aux champs' in Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*. The major chord that modulates to the minor is a simple quotation of the harmonic motif from the preceding symphony but is here robbed of its 'pessimistic' significance. The general mood of this first *Nachtmusik* has nothing tragic about it in spite of the march's fateful rhythm, with its reminiscences of the *Wunderhorn* settings of Mahler's Hamburg period and a 'military' dactylic rhythm borrowed from the song *Revelge* and heard on *col legno* violins. There are two alternating sections, the first on the first horn (with imitative writing in the lower strings) and the second on the double basses. Like the first, this second movement also contains passages where the musical argument comes to a halt, with fanfares and birdsong mingled at times with the cowbells from the preceding symphony. (Mahler gives instructions for the sound to be now closer, now more distant.) In the end the listener is disturbed by the surfeit of 'symbolic' elements borrowed from such different worlds. The cello melody of the first Trio, with its brass accompaniment of chordal triplets, is one of the most blatantly 'vulgar' of all Mahler's tunes, but a more detailed examination reveals asymmetries and subtleties of every kind. In the second Trio, marked 'Poco meno mosso', the tender duet for the two oboes seems to herald a total change of atmosphere, but the march rhythm gains the upper hand after only a few bars. The structure is harmoniously rounded off by the return of the two initial episodes freely reworked.

3. *Scherzo*. *Schattenhaft*. *Fließend aber nicht schnell* [Shadowy. Flowing but not fast], 3/4, D minor. A feeling of disquiet is manifest from the outset due to the curious rhythmic instability of the opening bars, with timpani strokes on the third (weak) beat and unstressed double-bass pizzicati on the strong beat. Mechanical-sounding triplets gyrate in an icy void, almost without harmonic support. A waltz episode briefly clears the atmosphere, but its initial gracefulness soon degenerates into wild and popular merrymaking (Berlioz's *Witches' Sabbath* is not far away), in which the triple rhythm is heavily, almost brutally, punched out on the brass. In the Trio, the lyrical and somewhat plaintive

strains of the flute and oboe seem to reestablish a sense of calm, but scurrying quavers almost at once destroy it.

4. *Nachtmusik. Andante amoroso. Mit Aufschwung* [With verve], 2/4, F major. Mahler knew what he was doing when he gave a crucial role not only to the harp but also to the guitar and mandolin, three instruments that rarely play such a prominent part within a symphonic context. Although this second *Nachtmusik* is not specifically described as a serenade, the marking 'amoroso', the insistent presence of plucked strings and its rhythmic regularity invest it with the character of a serenade. It is easy to understand why Schoenberg should have been so fascinated by this enigmatic movement, to the extent of incorporating Mahler's guitar into his own Serenade op. 24 of 1923.

Coming, as it does, before the fairground mood of the final movement, this second *Nachtmusik* fulfills a function similar to that of the Adagietto of the Fifth Symphony, but on this occasion we are dealing not with a simple orchestral song but with a genuine slow movement, the atmosphere of which has nothing in common with that of the famous Adagietto. Indeed, such is its ambiguity, false innocence, remote sense of nostalgia and absence of all subjectivity that it resembles no other movement by Mahler. The opening bars serve as an introduction, suggesting the serenader tuning his instrument. The same obsessive refrain returns between each episode, giving the form an air of simplicity and obviousness that is otherwise belied. The general tone and atmosphere remain impersonal and profoundly ambiguous while the movement as a whole defies any clearcut definition. A few brief passages suggest a more subjective feeling, but on each occasion they are interrupted by the return of the movement's regular rhythm and archaic-sounding accompanying figures.

5. *Rondo-Finale. Allegro ordinario*, 4/4, C major. We come now to the most surprising, unusual, disconcerting and, certainly, the least popular of Mahler's symphonic movements. He claimed that in writing it he wanted to depict 'the broad light of day' and dazzling midday sun, but, as in the final movement of the Fifth Symphony, irony invariably transforms merrymaking into mockery. Consequently, this final movement will always exercise a grim fascination as a sort of 'monster', not because of its outbursts of rambunctious good humour but on account of its paradoxes, grimaces, about-turns and grotesque Neo-Classicism.

The first thematic element to be heard is played on the least melodic of instruments—the timpani—and played, moreover, in a key (E minor) that is not even the key of the movement as a whole. The principal theme proclaims its origins in the overture of *Wagner's Die Meistersinger*. Within this fairground hubbub, all manner of bizarre events take place, notably the appearance of tonal formulas and fanfares divorced from their original context, which now affirm nothing so much as the impossibility of affirming anything at all. After so exuberant an opening, one might expect the movement to pursue an equally boisterous course, with a divertimento or a fugato, but instead an abrupt change of tone (and tonality) ushers in a curious tune in A-flat in which certain commentators have detected an allusion to the famous waltz from *The Merry Widow*. These two strongly contrasting episodes are soon followed by a third, a sort of parodistic minuet peppered with archaic formulas and old-fashioned contrapuntal passages. Its false innocence is out of place in such a context and confirms the sense of ambiguity familiar from *Die Meistersinger*, in which the learned and the comic are held in precarious balance. No less evident is the whimsical humour, irony and mocking tone associated with E.T.A. Hoffmann.

No amount of descriptive prose can ever do justice to this most disquieting of Mahler's movements, nor to the vast kaleidoscope of its development sections, in which the various motifs are ceaselessly broken down, distorted, transformed and shuffled like a pack of cards. The listener is left permanently wondering on what level to approach the music. The most striking aspects are the sense of discontinuity in which Mahler seems on this occasion to delight, the abrupt divisions between the different sections and what might be termed the 'polyphony' of the various styles and moods, a polyphony that ultimately seems to be the movement's essential *raison d'être*.

In any event, the return of the Allegro's swaggering theme at the end of this final movement is far from consummating the definitive triumph of some symphonic hero. To fathom the meaning of this enigmatic Rondo, we need, perhaps, to refer to more recent music in which quotations, borrowings and allusions to the past constitute the principal aim. In this writer's opinion, we need to listen to the final Rondo of the Seventh Symphony as though it were 'new music' or at least music presciently conscious of the malaise of our age. The phrase used by Mahler himself to define the

mood of this movement, 'Was kostet die Welt?' (everything, after all, has a price), takes no account of its ferocious irony, its sense of dislocation, its borrowed smiles, its false innocence or its dense developments and almost dizzying complexity. Is it not ultimately the triumph of the *Alltag* [quotidian]—Mahler's great enemy—that he celebrates here? For rejoicing constantly topples over into parody, the heavens merge into hell, day into night, joy into despair, laughter into grimacing, incense into sulphur, the Te Deum into a carnival song and gold into lead. And in spite of everything, in spite of all these abrupt divisions, these challenges and provocations—and perhaps even because of them—the listener may become convinced, in the course of these final pages, that Mahler never wrote anything as original or as prophetic as this unloved and disconcerting Rondo.

SYMPHONY NO. 8

First performance

Monday 12 September 1910, 7.30 p.m. Built entirely of glass and steel, the vast new concert hall of the International Exhibition Centre in Munich was full to overflowing with an audience of 3,400. Facing them was a chorus of 850 (500 adults and 350 children) dressed entirely in black and white and spread across the back of a huge rostrum specially built for the occasion, as well as one of the largest orchestras ever to have been assembled since the first performance of Berlioz's celebrated *Requiem*: 146 players, along with eight vocal soloists and eleven brass players (eight trumpeters and three trombonists) positioned elsewhere in the hall.

They were assembled for the long-awaited first performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony. The audience included many celebrities. In addition to the entire Bavarian royal family, many of the leading figures of contemporary culture were also present: the composers Richard Strauss, Max Reger, Camille Saint-Saëns and Alfredo Casella; the writers Gerhart Hauptmann, Thomas Mann, Stefan Zweig, Emil Ludwig, Hermann Bahr and Arthur Schnitzler; the conductors Bruno Walter, Oskar Fried and Franz Schalk; the most famous theatre director of his day, Max Reinhardt; and many many more. In the audience, the professionals were feverishly leafing through their scores, while others waited impatiently, consumed by curiosity, and still others felt certain they were about to witness another display of 'creative impotence'.

At exactly a quarter to eight Mahler stepped onto the platform. Thin and pale, he made his way quickly through the crowd of performers and, to quote William Ritter, a faithful witness of Mahler's premières at this time, he 'leapt onto the podium and immediately inspired a sense of confidence: great calm and absolute simplicity, the man sure of himself and devoid of all charlatanism'.

It was as if he had already forgotten the agitation of the last few days, with the sensationalist publicity drummed up by the impresario Emil Gutmann on behalf of the 'Symphony of a Thousand' (an over-the-top campaign that Mahler deemed worthy only of Barnum & Bailey), photographs of the composer on sale in all the shops, huge posters proclaiming his name in outsize letters and even the weeks of rehearsals with choirs in Leipzig and Vienna. What mattered now was the debut of his solemn mass for the present age that is the Eighth Symphony.

Mahler did not acknowledge the applause that greeted his appearance. 'Engrossed in his task, he did not even nod', Emil Ludwig recalled. 'For two seconds the lights could be seen reflected in his glasses and we thought we could see the head of a religious mathematician. The lights in the hall went down straightaway. And the massed choirs and orchestra shone in the full glare of the spotlights'. The work that he was about to conduct was, in Mahler's own words, 'the grandest thing I have done', a work 'so peculiar in content and form that it is really impossible to write anything about it' and in which 'there are no longer human voices, but planets and suns revolving'. It was a work that 'dispensed joy', so that all the 'tragic and subjective' works that he had written hitherto now struck him as no more than 'preludes'.

Composition

As he unleashed the vast choral and orchestral forces assembled before him, Mahler may well have recalled the day in July 1906 when he retired to his studio in the depths of the Carinthian forest. It was here that he had been overwhelmed by blinding inspiration, here that the blazing words of the Whitsun Hymn had struck him with all their irresistible force, here that the three incantatory words 'Veni, creator spiritus' had come to him as though by a miracle to dispel the sense of anxiety that he felt each year when, after eleven hyperactive months at the Vienna Court Opera, he came to pick up the threads of his creative life. That day, the whole work took on physical form in a few blinding flashes. Feverishly, he jotted down an outline of his plan:

1. Hymn: Veni, creator spiritus
2. Scherzo
3. Adagio
4. Hymn: The Birth of Eros.

It was no doubt also on that same day that he sketched out, on three staves, the theme of 'The Birth of Eros', now titled 'Creation by Eros'.

As always, it was only gradually that the initial outline assumed a clearer shape. The theme he had noted for the final movement still lacked text, but Mahler noticed that it was perfect for the words of *Veni, creator spiritus*, which he wanted to use for the opening movement. Similar coincidences had occurred on several previous occasions in his life, and each time he saw in them a mysterious sign from 'out there', a kind of mystical annunciation whose very strangeness was ultimately bound up with the act of artistic creation. Another incident of the same order finally persuaded him that on this occasion, too, he was the mouthpiece of forces greater than himself. He had only an incomplete recollection of the Latin hymn by Hrabanus Maurus, the ninth-century archbishop of Mainz, but soon the creative urge that he later described as having 'uplifted and hounded me for eight weeks' became so overwhelming that he began to write the music even without the missing words. He cabled to Vienna for the complete text. While waiting for it to arrive, he continued to write the music and had almost finished the movement when the telegram arrived with its surprising message. To his pride and satisfaction, Mahler discovered that the missing lines fitted the metre and character of the music like a glove. Once again, it seemed as if he were nothing more nor less than 'an instrument played by the whole universe'.

But where could he find an apt response to the burning genius of *Veni, creator spiritus*? How could he ensure that the second part of the symphony was a worthy counterpart and natural culmination of the first, which draws its strength from Hrabanus Maurus's grandiose hymn? Would he have to spend weeks on end rereading countless texts, as he had done in the case of the Second Symphony, only to end up writing his own words? On this occasion, fortunately, Mahler did not hesitate long. After all, Goethe—the poet whom he revered and cherished more than any other—had translated the Latin hymn into German towards the end of his life. It was in Goethe's works, therefore, that Mahler sought and found the words for his vast final movement, thereby providing a unique exception to his golden rule never to set to music poems that were already perfect and, therefore, self-sufficient. This time, however, Goethe had shown him the way by writing the final scene of *Faust* Part Two in the form of a cantata without music, an oratorio of the mind for soloists and chorus, the expression of a poetic vision so vast, so all-embracing and so universal that music alone could do it justice. Schumann had already set the entire scene while Liszt had set the final 'Chorus mysticus', but Mahler planned to treat it as an integral part of a vast symphonic organism, incorporating all the motifs from *Veni, creator spiritus* and turning Goethe's final scene into a sublimated affirmation of his own most deep-seated beliefs.

Form and character

Although perfectly coherent as a whole, the Eighth Symphony comprises two halves as dissimilar as possible, a dissimilarity already clear from their words, which are drawn from two different languages, two different cultures and two historical periods remote from one another. Far from attempting to blur this distinction, Mahler did all he could to underline it, treating *Veni, creator spiritus* as a strictly contrapuntal Latin hymn in an almost ecclesiastical style, albeit cast in traditional first-movement sonata form. Yet this style owes nothing to Bach (whose great choral works Mahler read and reread at this time) but derives instead from Renaissance models in the form of the *ricercare*.

The second part, by contrast, is a sort of free fantasia, more homophonic than polyphonic, breathing the spirit of German Romanticism and sometimes having even impressionistic style. Yet who would think of denying the complete sense of unity exuded by the whole? Such unity does not stem solely from the fact that both halves share the same thematic material but derives, rather, from the fact that the entire work expresses a single idea, moving forcefully and uninterruptedly towards its resplendent conclusion. The final 'Chorus mysticus' (each key word of which was commented on in one of Mahler's letters to his wife) is one of the most powerful passages in his entire oeuvre, if not in the whole history of music.

At first the Eighth Symphony might give the impression of being a vast cantata, whereas it is in fact a symphony in every sense of the term: it is a symphony *for* (rather than *with*) soloists, chorus and orchestra; a symphony, moreover, in which the human voices, treated in an entirely instrumental way, expound and develop the whole of the thematic material. It is also an 'objective' piece as

opposed to a 'subjective' one, whereas the three works that were to follow are all imbued with a sense of farewell inspired by the death of Mahler's daughter (not, as has been claimed far too often, by the prospect of his own impending death). It is the first of his works not to contain any quotations or distant and stylised echoes of any fanfare, march or ländler. Above all, the Eighth Symphony is an act of faith and love, a reply to all the questions and uncertainties of the human condition. It glorifies earthly activity as much as any transcendent concerns. Faust's final redemption is a justification of ceaseless human striving because, at the end of a quest that has led him so far from asceticism and from all that is traditionally considered to lead to paradise, he is welcomed into heaven by the Mater gloriosa herself.

A few technical points

Even the most casual listener will find in this score signs of an evolution and undeniable deepening of Mahler's style—not in terms of contrapuntal technique, in spite of the fact that the polyphonic mastery of *Veni, creator spiritus* is unparalleled since the time of Bach and the great Renaissance polyphonists, nor even in terms of its harmonic writing, which, in comparison to that of the preceding symphony, reveals a certain regression. Mahler clearly wanted to build his church on granite, with the result that the work as a whole is of almost immutable tonal stability: 'How often does this movement come to E-flat, for instance on a four-six chord', Schoenberg wrote of the opening movement. 'I would cut that out in any student's work, and advise him to seek out another tonality. And, incredibly, here it is right! Here it fits! Here it could not even be otherwise. What do the rules say about it? Then the rules must be changed'.

Mahler's true achievement in writing the Eighth Symphony lies strictly in the compositional field. Most important in this respect is his systematic use of 'deviation' (*Abweichung*) or 'variant', which Adorno quite rightly contrasted with classical variation. From the Eighth Symphony onwards, Mahler's music is characterised by a constant evolution of the thematic material, which becomes immensely supple and mobile, always recognisable, yet always different. Yet, as Adorno goes on to note, Mahler's use of thematic transformation never compromises the theme's expressive charge as often happens with classical variation.

The thematic material

One has the impression that Mahler wanted to counterbalance the dissimilarities between the two texts by means of a thematic unity found in none of his other earlier or later works. The first theme of the second movement (heard on the cellos and basses) involves a falling interval reminiscent of the first two notes of the work's initial motif (on the syllables 'Ve-ni') and is followed by an ascending phrase borrowed from the 'Accende lumen' theme. In much the same way, the 'love theme' that marks the entry of the Mater gloriosa harkens back to the melody that enters on the winds in the fourth bar of the second part. Time and again Mahler uses thematic recall to underline the kinship between the words and ideas of Goethe's *Faust* and those of *Veni, creator spiritus*. Both 'Amorem cordibus' and 'Hände, verschlinget euch', for example, are entrusted to the children's chorus, while similar parallels link 'Infirma nostri corporis' with 'Uns bleibt ein Erdenrest', 'Imple superna gratia' with 'Er ahnet kaum das frische Leben' and 'Zieht uns hinan' with 'Accende lumen'. The whole work is dominated by the opening phrase of *Veni, creator spiritus*, the resolution, eloquence and epigrammatical concision of which give little inkling of its extreme rhythmic complexity, with three changes of time-signature within the space of only four bars. The opening notes (E-flat, B-flat and A-flat) have the same unifying role to play in the Eighth Symphony as the notes A, G and E in *Das Lied von der Erde*. It is these notes, moreover, that dominate in the final apotheosis of each of the work's two movements.

Orchestration

Mahler's orchestra for the Eighth Symphony is less extensive than that used by Schoenberg in his *Gurre-Lieder*, the instrumentation of which was completed in 1911. It comprises 4 flutes, 2 piccolos, 4 oboes, 1 cor anglais, 6 clarinets (including 2 in E-flat), 4 bassoons and 1 contrabassoon, 8 horns, 4 trumpets, 4 trombones and 1 tuba, a large percussion section, piano, celesta, harmonium, organ, glockenspiel, at least 2 harps and 1 mandolin, in addition to off-stage brass and the usual strings. As always, Mahler sought clarity and transparency above all, even in the densest tutti and most intricate contrapuntal passages. If the acoustics are not too reverberant, if the work is faithfully and

carefully performed and if the resources are adequate, each detail of the score should remain clearly audible. And again typical of Mahler, numerous passages are instrumented with an exemplary economy of means.

Analysis

1. *Erster Teil* [Part One]. Hymn: 'Veni, creator spiritus'. Allegro impetuoso, 4/4, E-flat major. The essential features of this movement's formal structure have already been indicated above. It is cast in first-movement sonata form, the three sections of which are in more or less normal proportions: a 168-bar exposition, with first subject ('Veni, creator spiritus'), second subject ('Imple superna gratia' [*Etwas gemäßigter*] in D-flat) and concluding theme ('Infirma nostri corporis' in E-flat); a 243-bar development section comprising three sections preceded by an orchestral introduction (*Etwas hastig*), the first section introducing a new element ('Infirma nostri corporis' [*Noch einmal so langsam als vorher*] in C-sharp minor), the second beginning with an invocation to the light ('Accende lumen' [*Mit plötzlichem Aufschwung*] in E major), which constitutes the climax of the entire movement, and the third ('Praevio te ductore' in E-flat) set as an immense double fugue, 101 bars in length. This final section leads into a foreshortened reprise (80 bars) followed by a vast 86-bar coda ('Gloria patri' [*Breiter*]).

2. *Zweiter Teil: Schlußszene aus 'Faust'* [Part Two: Closing Scene from 'Faust']. Poco adagio, *Etwas bewegter*, etc., 4/4, 6/4, 4/4, 2/2 etc., E-flat minor, E-flat major, etc. The second part of the symphony is merely a series of episodes, the strongly contrasting nature of which is established by the text. A number of writers have attempted to see in it three sections corresponding to the last three movements of a Classical symphony, but such an interpretation fails to convince. The orchestral introduction anticipates four later episodes, summarising them in the manner of an operatic overture: the initial chorus, the two solos for the Pater Ecstaticus and Pater Profundus and the chorus of angels ('Ich spüre soeben').

Apotheosis

The first performance of the Eighth Symphony in Munich in 1910 proved to be one of the greatest triumphs in the history of music. Mahler's incomparable genius in balancing his massed forces, the evident wealth of melodic invention based on a very limited number of cells and the splendour of the two codas could not fail to fascinate the audience. Mahler had just turned fifty. His whole career hitherto as a composer had been an almost uninterrupted sequence of setbacks and dubious successes, with the result that he was both astounded and moved to tears to see the entire audience screaming, stamping their feet and applauding wildly in a collective frenzy lasting some twenty minutes. The children's choir in particular, on whom he had lavished endless care and attention during the rehearsals, kept on applauding and waving their handkerchiefs and scores. They rushed down from their seats and leaned over the balustrade to give him flowers and shake his hand, shouting 'Long live Mahler! Our Mahler!' at the tops of their voices and presenting him with the only laurel wreath of the evening, a gesture that moved him profoundly. For Mahler, these children represented the future that he felt was slipping inexorably away from him. When he left to return to his hotel, he found a group of applauding admirers waiting for him outside the hall and had to force his way to his car.

All who were present that evening noted how pale and drawn he looked (his appearance was memorably described by Thomas Mann under the name of Gustav von Aschenbach in *Der Tod in Venedig*). Nothing, except perhaps his waxen skin, could suggest that his end was so close. Yet an anonymous witness, who had never spoken to him, was able to read the future in these curious features. The man in question was a young artist who, during the tumultuous applause, turned to the Viennese critic, Richard Specht: 'That man will soon die! Look at those eyes! That's not the expression of a triumphant general marching towards new victories. It's the expression of a man who already feels the weight of death on his shoulders!'

Even before he had reached his fiftieth year, Mahler had watched as, one by one, the most solid links binding him to life had been severed. He had lost his much-loved daughter when she was only four. He had had to leave the Vienna Hofoper to which he had devoted so much time and energy. He had discovered that his health, which he had formerly taken for granted, was undermined. And, most recently of all, he had been told by his wife, whose wit and beauty both fascinated and

frightened him, that she no longer loved him and had found happiness in the arms of a lover. Admittedly, she had gone on to say that she would never abandon him, but he was nonetheless deeply wounded. Nevertheless, the heroic courage that he had always shown in the face of adversity would enable him to pursue his activities unabated, to complete the last movements of his Tenth Symphony in short score and to conduct three-quarters of the most strenuous season of concerts in New York that he had ever conducted in his life. But an implacable bacterial infection would still carry him off barely eight months later.

In short, the great ascent towards the light of the 'Chorus mysticus' contained no earthly message for Mahler. When he regretfully took his leave of Munich, he declined their invitation to return the following year to conduct his Ninth Symphony but promised to come back for the first performance of *Das Lied von der Erde*. In the end, his favourite disciple, Bruno Walter, conducted it in his stead. Mahler had been right to fear the fatal number: on the day when *Das Lied von der Erde* (his veritable Ninth Symphony) was launched upon its successful career, he had already been dead for several months, no doubt enjoying the heavenly bliss promised by the Eighth.

DAS LIED VON DER ERDE

The year 1907

The distance is so vast between the Eighth Symphony, Mahler's triumphal hymn addressed to humanity at large, and *Das Lied von der Erde*, a humble meditation on man's destiny on earth, that moving from one to the other is almost like entering a new universe. To explain such a radical change of mood, we must recall the rapid succession of tragic events that took place in Mahler's life in 1907. The first was his taking leave of the hated and beloved Vienna Opera where he had for ten years realized so many of his theatrical and musical dreams; the second the death, at the beginning of the summer, of his elder daughter, Putzi, from diphtheria; and the last the frightening diagnosis pronounced by a Maiernigg physician and a Vienna specialist that Mahler was suffering from a heart ailment, which he at first wrongly interpreted as a death sentence. Moreover, these misfortunes, far from bringing together the ill-matched Mahler and wife Alma, had driven them further apart. From that time on they went about their lives isolated from one another by grief. During the summer of 1907 Mahler immersed himself in a volume of Chinese poems in German verse adaptations, entitled *Die chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute), a recent gift from Theobald Pollak, an old and faithful friend of the family who watched over the couple with a paternal eye. In the late autumn of 1907 Mahler left Europe for America, where he had accepted an engagement to conduct a four-month season at the Metropolitan Opera. New York was not, to be sure, the ideal place for him to practice his art, if only because the audiences there much preferred Italian to German opera. Nevertheless, he was quickly won over by the generosity of spirit and lack of prejudice of the New World and was happy to find financial security there. Thus it was in New York that he began to live and work again, and it was there that he gradually recovered his strength.

Composition

But the bustle of rehearsals and performances offered Mahler only superficial relief. In June 1908, when he returned to Europe and set up for the summer in Toblach in the Dolomites of South Tyrol, he had to deny himself his favourite recreational exercises: swimming, rowing, cycling and climbing. 'This time I must change not only my home', he wrote to Bruno Walter, 'but also my whole way of life. You can't imagine how hard it is for me. For years I've been used to constant and vigorous exercise, roaming about through forests and mountains, and then bringing home my drafts like prizes plundered from nature. I would go to my desk only as a peasant goes into his barn, just to give shape to my sketches. Even spiritual indisposition used to vanish after a good trudge (especially uphill). Now I am supposed to avoid any exertion, to watch over myself constantly, not to walk much. And in this solitude here, which leaves me to concentrate on myself, I am all the more aware of what is physically wrong with me. Perhaps my outlook has become too gloomy, but since I've been living in the country I've felt less well than in the city, where many distractions took my mind off things.' Nearly every year Mahler had gone through a serious crisis before resuming his compositional activities at the end of an opera season. But never before was the transition as painful as in 1908. Bruno Walter's tactless suggestion that he take a trip served only to aggravate him and, in the following letter, his irritation can be sensed behind the irony: 'What's all this nonsense about the soul and its sickness? How should I go about curing it? On a journey to the northern countries? But there I'll just be "distracted" again. To find my way to myself again I need to be here alone. Since this panic had seized me, I've tried only to direct my eyes and ears elsewhere but, to rediscover myself, I've got to accept the horrors of loneliness. But basically I am speaking in riddles, for you don't know what has happened and is happening within me; in any case it is not a hypochondriac's fear of death, as you seem to think. I've long known that I must die. But all at once I have lost the serenity and confidence I'd acquired, and I find myself facing the void. Now, at the end of my life, I have to learn to stand and walk all over again like a beginner. . . . As far as my 'work' is concerned, it's most depressing to have to relearn everything. I cannot work at my desk—I need outside exercise for my inner exercise. . . . After a gentle little stroll I'm filled with anxiety when I return, and my pulse beats so fast that it doesn't serve the purpose of making me forget my body. . . .'

Alma, the chief witness to this summer of crisis, confirms that they had never before spent such a sombre holiday. They were plagued everywhere by 'anxiety and grief'. Yet Mahler had, throughout his life, confronted the worst disasters with heroic courage and an unbending will. Once again he found 'the path to himself' in his creative work, i.e. in the composition of *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Having arrived at Toblach on 11 June, he completed the second song in July. The five others were completed by 1 September. To his visitors that summer he seemed transformed—he had become calm and patient. He had emerged from the crisis a different man. As he wrote at the beginning of September before leaving Toblach—again to Bruno Walter: 'I've been working with tremendous intensity (you can probably guess that I'm now feeling quite "acclimatized"). I can't yet say what the whole (work) will be called. I've been granted some beautiful moments, and I believe this will be the most personal thing I've done so far.'

During the winter Mahler resumed his activities at the Metropolitan and, as usual, copied out his new score and finalized the orchestration. But the piece was still without a title. For a long time—at least a year—it was called *Die Flöte aus Jade* (The Flute of Jade). The following winter, upon returning to New York after composing his next, and last, completed symphony, he scribbled on a sheet of music paper: '*The Song of the Earth, from the Chinese*', followed by the titles he had given to the various movements and, finally, at the bottom of the page: 'Ninth Symphony in four movements'. Thus he believed he had outwitted a cruel fate that had not allowed Beethoven, Schubert, and Bruckner to compose more symphonies than the fateful number nine.

The Poems

Mahler had always avoided setting literary masterpieces to music because he believed that great poetry should stand alone. Consequently he had always selected poems to which music could bring a new dimension. Hans Bethge (1876-1946), author of *Die Chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute), was, like Goethe and Rückert, fascinated by Oriental literature. Since he did not know a word of Chinese, he wrote free verse translations, or rather adaptations, on the basis of existing French versions by Judith Gautier (1867) and the Marquis d'Hervey St-Denis (1862). Executed with taste and refinement, and presented as a lovely little volume bound with silk thread, his little collection comprised some 80 poems, mostly dating from the eighth century, Chinese poetry's most glorious period. In Bethge's collection, pride of place goes to Li T'ai Po (or Li Bai). This widely traveled high official of the imperial court, called the 'prince of poetry' by his contemporaries, was universally admired in his time for his formal perfection, and ability to express a wide range of impressions and feelings—with, however, a marked predilection for the pleasures of wine and the joys of friendship. The first, third, fourth and fifth songs of *Das Lied von der Erde* are based on his texts (although the original Chinese hasn't yet been found for the third). Less well known are Ts'ien Ts'i (or Qian Qi), the author of the second song, 'Der Einsame im Herbst' (The Lonely One in Autumn), and Mong-Kao-Jèn (or Meng Hao-ran) and Wang-Wei, two friends whose poems were combined and set to music in the final 'Abschied' (The Farewell). Mahler made these last two texts, which express the basic 'message' of the work, into something entirely his own, not hesitating to add to them a number of lines of his own invention.

It is easy to understand why the melancholy in the poems evoked such a strong response from Mahler at a time when he was still recovering from his daughter's death. In a period when death had struck the 'flesh of his flesh', his beloved child, he was more conscious than ever of mankind's sorrow and of the brevity of human life on this earth. Not only are these two of the main themes of the anthology, he found in Bethge entire phrases echoing those he had himself written in his youth. He had, at the age of 24, written:

The weary men close their eyes
To rediscover forgotten happiness in sleep!

How moving it must have been for him to read, years later, in Bethge's adaptation of Mong-Kao-Jèn:

The toiling men wend their way homewards
Longing to find peace in sleep

Lied and Symphony

No composer before Mahler had ever devoted himself exclusively to two genres so apparently incompatible as the intimate lied and the grandiose symphony. Thus it is fascinating in *Das Lied von der Erde* to see him combining, at this late stage of his career, these two seemingly opposed genres

in a 'symphony of lieder' for two solo voices and orchestra. Mahler had, of course, always been inspired by the human voice when writing for instruments, and he also made use in his songs of the developmental procedures characteristic of sonata form. This time, however, the direction was reversed: he planned at first to write a mere song-cycle, but, little by little, it grew into a new kind of symphony.

Structure

Like the Seventh Symphony, *Das Lied von der Erde* is made up of two larger outer movements separated by a group of shorter pieces. The first song can, in many respects, be likened to a symphonic Allegro, while the character and dimensions of the second are that of a true symphonic Andante. For the first time since the Third Symphony, the Finale, one of the longest Mahler ever composed, is a long Adagio. Moreover, the essential message of the work is communicated by these two slow movements, which deal with weighty subjects—melancholy, fate, the approach of death. The other four pieces depict the fragile splendours of life: youth, beauty, drunkenness—that intoxication which, according to Li Tai PO, is the only way of escaping from the painful realities of life on earth.

As we shall see, the discovery of Chinese music stimulated Mahler to adopt certain features, such as the pentatonic scale, and to use instruments suggesting those of China, such as the mandolin, harp, winds and tambourine. It should be pointed out, however, that these exotic touches are more prevalent in the faster movements than in the two slow ones. By chance I once learned, in the course of a conversation with the daughter of one of Mahler's friends, that he had been interested enough in authentic Chinese music to ask a friend to let him hear phonograph cylinders recorded in China and preserved at the University of Vienna.

Style and Language

As always with Mahler, the apparent simplicity and spontaneity of the musical discourse is achieved through complex technical procedures, more so than ever at this late stage of his career in which his art was resolutely pointing towards the future. The *Rückert-Lieder* already marked the beginning of a thorough integration of the voice with the instrumental texture, but this time Mahler goes farther: the voice and the instruments are tightly interwoven in a relationship that is guided by the text in a constant give-and-take. Another basic innovation in *Das Lied von der Erde* is the use of the same motifs in both the principal and secondary voices—prefiguring one of the basic principles of Schoenberg's serial composition, 'total thematicism'. *Das Lied von der Erde* also inaugurates a process that was only glimpsed in the *Rückert-Lieder*, known as heterophony (or 'imprecise unison'), a principle in which a melody and an ornamented or varied version of it are heard simultaneously, or in which identical voices diverge slightly in rhythm or in interval structure. What is heard, in fact, are 'all sorts of apparently disparate melodies which are actually amalgamated in a single, indivisible complex of sound'.

The economy of means, the rarefied textures that characterize the greater part of the final 'Abschied' were also a new phenomenon in the history of music. The various melodic lines often lack an underlying bass line and are completely independent, both rhythmically and melodically. Not only are there many examples of three against two (something dear to Brahms), but one also finds four against three, five against two, three or five against eight... Only an unusually skilled conductor could confront such formidable difficulties. Mahler himself once pointed out a passage in the final movement to his disciple Bruno Walter and asked him: 'Have you the slightest idea how to conduct this? I haven't!' One last essential point: the entire melodic material of *Das Lied von der Erde* is derived from a single cell of three notes—A-G-E—which form part of the pentatonic—hence the Chinese—scale.

The music

1. *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde* (The Drinking Song of Earth's Sorrow).

There is a somewhat forced quality to the exhilaration, a breathlessness that renders the gestures ineffective and causes them to collapse upon themselves. The four strophes are linked by a refrain ('Dark is life, dark is death'), which remains identical but is heard in a different key each time.

The only surge of true lyricism in this first song occurs at the moment at which one of the essential 'themes' of the whole work appears in the poem: that of the 'eternally blue firmament' and the Earth blossoming forth each spring, which stand in direct contrast to the brief duration of human life and to the 'rotting trifles' (*morschen Tande*) of mankind's world. The startling apparition of the ape crouching on the graves makes terrifying demands on the tenor's highest register to suggest the howling animal. In fact, this whole song appears to be written for a more powerful voice from the third and fifth.

2. Der Einsame im Herbst (The Lonely One in Autumn).

A steady, deliberately monotonous unbroken sequence of quavers on the strings sets the autumnal landscape, with short exchanges in the winds derived from the work's main leitmotif: the lake shrouded in mist, the grass covered with frost, the flowers withered and the icy wind bending down their stems. Each strophe contains a warmly expressive second element, which interrupts the garland of quavers. As usual with Mahler, all kinds of asymmetries and irregularities are hidden behind the apparent simplicity of this scheme. When, towards the end of the song, the soloist refers to the 'sun of love': a powerful melodic outburst puts an end to the rising and falling scales, but their same desolate monotony returns in the final coda. The 'sun of love' was only a mirage.

3. Von der Jugend (Youth).

For setting the 'Chinese' décor of the three ensuing narrative songs, Mahler uses pentatonic motifs and an orchestra coloured with 'far-eastern' sonorities: triangle, bass drum, cymbals, woodwind, and piccolo trills. The handsome youths chatting and writing verses while drinking tea in the 'porcelain pavilion' (Judith Gautier) are reflected in the pool. Towards the end of the song the music takes a turn to the minor, and the coda has a distinctly Viennese, suggesting a Waltz, despite its duple meter.

4. Von der Schönheit (Of Beauty).

Once again the 'Chinese' character is emphasized by the pentatonic scale and exquisite orchestral refinements that emphasize the sonority of woodwinds, harps and glockenspiel. Young girls are gathering lotus flowers by the river's edge. As a group of young riders appear, the scene changes colour, and the tempo accelerates. Brass fanfares and fortissimo percussion lend a brilliance unique in the whole work to this central episode. The constant *accelerando* taxes the soloist's diction, especially if the conductor unduly hastens the tempo. The sudden return of the initial tempo brings back the feminine grace of the first strophe, with the 'loveliest of the young maidens' casting a longing glance after the young men. The exquisite coda belongs to Mahler's finest achievements: a distanced reflection on the fragility of the 'illusion' that we call beauty.

5. Der Trunkene im Frühling (The Drunkard in Spring).

Mahler the ascetic, who according to Alma, never allowed himself the slightest excess of food or drink, again sings of the oblivion derived from wine. But it was probably not the theme of drunkenness that inspired Mahler's choice of this Bethge poem, but rather that of the advent of spring and its yearly miracle of which Mahler himself had once sung in one of his first youthful poems. It is here symbolized in twittering woodwinds by a bird, the harbinger of spring that 'sings and laughs'. The dream is short-lived and the sobered-up drinker refills the cup of oblivion.

6. Der Abschied (The Farewell).

As mentioned earlier, Mahler, in this last song, combined two poems with similar themes by different authors. To the second poem he added some lines of his own, such as:

*My heart is still and awaits its hour...
and
I shall wander to my homeland, to my place of rest...
and
O beauty, o world eternally drunk with life and love!...*

The two poems are linked by a long orchestral episode in the style of a funeral march. The whole orchestration is characteristically spare and transparent, almost paradoxically so. The length of this finale nearly equals that of the five other pieces combined, and it is, in all respects, the expressive

climax of the whole work. Each of the three main sections is preceded by a vocal recitative. Here Mahler unites the symphonist's rigour and the craft of the architect-musician who simulates improvisation while, in fact, endlessly transforming the same melodic cells. This entire Finale could be interpreted as a single entity, during which the great descending, then ascending, *Lebenssthem*a ('theme of life') gradually evolves, and attains its complete shape and its full splendour only in the final coda.

The initial low C resounds twice, like a cavernous knell, on low horns, contrabassoons, low harps, and tam-tam. As in the Ninth Symphony, the main thematic cells of the movement appear in rapid succession: a quick *gruppetto* (oboe) with its sad reply, a harmonic third on low horns; a brief motif that is repeated three times, first in 32nd notes, then in 16ths, and finally in 8ths; and the horns' sighing harmonic thirds that descend towards their low register. The violins tentatively sketch a fourth motif in the major that also ends in sighs, and the whole introductory section closes with a quick descending chromatic scale (on woodwinds) that recurs several times, in various instrumental registers, at the end of the various sections.

In the first recitative, the flute solo pursues an independent course from the voice, in a manner that is both highly original and characteristic of this movement. The brief motifs of the orchestral introduction are later constantly transformed, developed, amplified or diminished, in endlessly varied instrumentation. In the contrasting episode ('Der Bach singt'), which is later amplified into the coda of the movement, the same melodic and rhythmic independence is maintained between the long, sinuous woodwind phrase (later taken up by the violins), and the ecstatic vocal line, in long note-values. Both rest on an accompaniment of melodic thirds (harp and clarinets, then altos).

In the second main section, the contrasting episode follows immediately after the recitative, and a new, ecstatic melody (the *Lebenssthem*a on flutes, and later violins) gradually unfolds over the vocal line ('Ich sehne mich, o Freund'). Here, the independence of the two lines is carried to extremes, creating terrifying problems for the conductor because of the slow tempo, the long note-values, and the vastly different meters. This is surely the passage Mahler was alluding to when speaking to Bruno Walter about the problems he had imposed on conductors.

In the last section that follows the orchestral interlude, the *Lebenssthem*a reaches its full efflorescence on the words: 'the dear Earth blossoms forth in spring'. Yet this climactic melody is neither sung nor played *in toto* either by the voice or by the instruments. It constantly passes from one to the other, while counter-melodies ornament, surround, prolong and amplify it, lending it a dimension of 'openness'. This dimension is preserved until the very end, when the final C major chord upon which the flute and the clarinet obstinately maintain a dissonant A instead of letting it descend to G, as traditional harmony would require. It imparts a sense of timelessness to the final bars, in which the last two notes of the solo voice ('Ewig', E - D) are also not allowed to reach the tonic (C). Furthermore, three of the four notes in this final chord are those of the main leitmotif of the work—A-G-E. The movement ends in near-silence with the *pianississimo* tonic chord sustained by three trombones and woodwinds, and brief arpeggio fragments plucked at by the harp, mandolin and celesta.

This profoundly affecting conclusion, so gentle, so serene, so restrained and quietly confident, offers a positive response to the poignant, funereal lamentation that precedes the last poem and sings of the weariness and despair of man, as a prisoner of the here-below. The work's concluding lines are Mahler's own:

*The dear Earth blossoms forth everywhere
in spring and grows green again!
Everywhere and eternally the horizon
shines blue and bright!
Eternally, eternally, eternally...*

Theodor Adorno once remarked that Mahler was the first composer since Beethoven to have a characteristic 'late style'. In his last slow movements, it is as though a serene acceptance of fate were illuminated by a distant radiance coming from beyond. At the end of Mahler's short life, when his supreme mastery could make light of every formal problem and every constraint, his music attains a new level of quiet, contemplative lyricism. The material becomes rarefied as the voices are

spaced out and hover in the ether, liberated from the laws of gravity and the normal constraints of counterpoint. In the final 'Farewell' of *Das Lied von der Erde*, a breath of consolation and peace wafts over man as he longs to merge with the eternity of nature blossoming anew each spring.

SYMPHONY NO. 9

Theodor Adorno saw in Mahler 'the first composer since Beethoven to have a "late style"', a statement that may perhaps explain why a majority of commentators still believe that, in writing his Ninth Symphony, Mahler in 1909 was gravely ill and haunted by the spectre of his impending death. In fact, he was then forty-nine years old and more active than ever. Each year he crossed the Atlantic to conduct long seasons of operas and concerts in the United States. Yet there is no denying that like its predecessor, *Das Lied von der Erde*, the Ninth Symphony was written in the shadow of death, that two years earlier Mahler lost a four-year-old and dearly beloved daughter, that he was obliged to quit the Vienna Court Opera and that in the course of a routine examination, a doctor diagnosed a serious—if not fatal—heart condition.

Within a year, however, life had changed course once more. At the end of the spring of 1908, Alma rented two floors of a large house in the mountains of South-Tirol and had a wooden *Komponierhäuschen* built for her husband among fir trees. There Mahler once again began to recover his inner balance. He had always combined the hypersensitivity of genius with an invincible courage that enabled him to face up to all crises. When Bruno Walter enquired after his health and suggested he was suffering from a psychosomatic disorder, Mahler replied, not without a trace of annoyance:

It is only here, in solitude, that I might come to myself and become conscious of myself. For since that panic fear which overcame me that time, all I have tried has been to avert my eyes and close my ears. —If I am to find the way back to myself again, I must surrender to the horrors of loneliness. [...] But it is certainly not that hypochondriac fear of death, as you suppose. I had already realised that I shall have to die. —But without trying to explain or describe to you something for which there are perhaps no words at all, I'll just tell you that at a blow I have simply lost all the clarity and quietude I ever achieved; and that I stood vis-à-vis de rien, and now at the end of life am again a beginner who must find his feet.

In the same letter to Bruno Walter, Mahler spelt out the real reason for the panic that had seized hold of him: he had been obliged to give up all his favourite sports, including swimming, rowing, walking in the mountains and cycling:

I confess that [...] this is the greatest calamity that has ever befallen me. [...] Where my 'work' is concerned, it is rather depressing to have to begin learning one's job all over again. I cannot work at my desk. My mental activity must be complemented by physical activity. [...] An ordinary, moderate walk gives me such a rapid pulse and such palpitations that I never achieve the purpose of walking—to forget my body. [...] For many years I have been used to constant and vigorous exercise, roaming about in the mountains and woods, and then, like a kind of jaunty bandit, bearing home my drafts. I used to go to my desk only as a peasant goes into his barn, to work up my sketches.

Composition

Gradually, however, the miracle happened. After he had discovered in *Das Lied von der Erde* the main features of his 'late style', he forged ahead the following summer and set to work on what was to become his last completed symphony, the Ninth. It is clear, therefore, that Mahler had come to terms with the emotional crisis that had seized him during the months following the death of his daughter and his departure from Vienna, and it is no less certain that these events had changed him. Other thoughts had taken possession of him that had little to do with that of death. Thus the Andante of the Ninth Symphony is shot through with a burning love of life. Alban Berg was not mistaken when he wrote in one of his letters to his wife:

I have once more played through Mahler's Ninth. The first movement is the most glorious he ever wrote. It expresses an extraordinary love of this earth, for Nature; the longing to live on it in peace, to enjoy it completely, to the very heart of one's being, before death comes, as irresistibly it does. The whole movement is based on a premonition of death, which is constantly recurring. All earthly dreams end here; that is why the tenderest passages are followed by tremendous climaxes like new eruptions of a volcano. This, of course, is most obvious of all in the place where the premonition of

death becomes certain knowledge, where in the most profound and anguished love of life death appears 'mit höchster Gewalt'; then the ghostly solos of violin and viola, and those sounds of chivalry: death in armour. Against that there is no resistance left, and I see what follows as a sort of resignation. Always, though, with the thought of 'the other side. [...]'. Again, for the last time, Mahler turns to the earth—not to battles and great deeds, which he strips away, just as he did in *Das Lied von der Erde* in the chromatic morendo downward runs—but solely and totally to Nature. What treasures has Earth still to offer for his delight, and for how long?

A Farewell?

The omnipresence of the 'farewell' motif from Beethoven's op. 81a Piano Sonata ('Les adieux') in the first movement of the symphony clearly confirms that this is the 'subject matter' of the Andante. Yet, in the Ninth Symphony, other moods and other dispositions lead us far away from this initial sense of valediction. First and foremost, there is the intense love of life that pervades countless passages in the opening movement with its feverish ardour. Beyond serenity, Mahler rediscovers passion and, in the middle movements, even the grotesque visions of his earlier works. In the Seventh Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*, the intermediary movements had functioned more or less as intermezzos. In the Ninth, the demon of derision is unleashed with an aggressive violence never before encountered in Mahler's works. The Scherzo and the Rondo-Burleske push to their very limits some of the features that had so disconcerted the composer's contemporaries in many of his earlier works, with their distortions and grinning parody. Here they are taken to their furthest extreme. The absurdity of the world is savagely caricatured in a veritable delirium of counterpoint with a sort of destructive rage.

It has often been observed that in his final works Mahler distanced himself from sonata form. In the opening Andante of the Ninth Symphony he dispenses with the contrastive tonalities associated with sonata form, if not with its traditional principle of thematic development. The dialectic alternation between two subjects also survives, even if those subjects are in the same key and involve only a contrast in modes between leave-taking (major) and 'thirst for life' (minor).

Analysis

1. After a few bars of introduction, in which the economy of means and refined choice of sonorities irresistibly recalls those of Webern, the opening movement (Andante comodo, 4/4, D major/minor) adopts, like so many others by the composer, the rhythm of a slow march that sometimes builds up speed, only to revert to its earlier inexorable tread. The dramatic intensity that had typified Mahler's previous opening movements gives way here to a sense of mournful resignation that is none the less accompanied by great outbursts of passion (Second subject: 'etwas frischer'). The initial rhythm is shared between the cellos and fourth horn; the harp then states the three-note motif that is to dominate the movement as a whole, after which the second horn (now stopped) announces the third of the basic motifs, a sextuplet on the violas consisting of two notes a third apart. As in *Das Lied von der Erde*, the interval of a falling second on the violins plays a symbolic role throughout the entire movement. Unlike its model—the 'farewell' motif from Beethoven's Piano Sonata 'Les adieux'—this two-note motif (F-sharp—E) does not descend to the tonic but remains in suspense, thus giving the work an element of openness: open to infinity. Moreover, it was precisely this two-note motif, comprising the third and second degrees of the scale, that had ended *Das Lied von der Erde* with the contralto solo's famous 'ewig' (E—D [—C]).

The syncopated rhythm of the opening bars is of symbolic importance: it occurs three times within the course of the movement, where it seems to represent the imperious voice of fate. As pointed out above, Alban Berg saw in it a symbol of death. Following the double exposition of this initial theme, the violins introduce a new thematic element in the minor, this time impassioned. To this, the horns soon add another important element, a chromatic triplet motif before the return of the principal theme. In the final coda, all sense of time is suspended. The flute ascends slowly towards its highest register before gradually returning to earth in a rarefied atmosphere. A distant, tender memory of the principal theme brings the movement to an end on a note of unutterable resignation and ineffable fervour.

2. Of all Mahler's Scherzos, that of the Ninth (*Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers* [At the tempo of a leisurely ländler], 3/4, C major), which Mahler had originally thought of as a Minuet, is the most

ironic and grotesque. It derives a good deal of its character from its orchestration, as is clear from its very first bars, in which rapid scalar motifs are entrusted to the violas and bassoons. Such sardonic humour was without precedent at the time, except perhaps in Stravinsky's contemporary *Petrushka* and the Neo-Classical music, written later between the two wars. Three subjects and three principal tempi alternate with each other: a strikingly rustic ländler (the performance marking is '*etwas täppisch und sehr derb*' [somewhat ungainly and very coarse]), followed by a fast waltz that gradually builds up speed in a whirlwind of expressionist savagery, and finally a second ländler that is so slow that it calls to mind an old-fashioned minuet.

3. The Rondo-Burleske (Allegro assai (*Sehr trotzig* [Very defiant]), 2/2, A minor) is dedicated in one of the autographed manuscripts 'To my brothers in Apollo'; the present movement surpasses even its predecessor in grim violence. It demands a high degree of orchestral virtuosity, with a quasi-permanent fugato in which all the different instrumental groups assume a solo role in turn. Mahler deploys all his polyphonic skills but does so in such a way that he appears to be making a mockery of contrapuntal techniques and thumbing his nose at the 'academics' who, throughout his life, had showered him with endless insults.

In this often dizzying race to the abyss, two contrasting episodes claim our attention. The first, in 2/4-time, recalls the 'Weiber-Chanson' from Act Two of Lehár's *Die lustige Witwe*, while the second interrupts the febrile agitation of the Rondo ('*Etwas gehalten. Mit großer Empfindung*' [Held back a little. With great feeling]). It states by anticipation the final movement's principal motif in the form of a simple gruppetto. More than once it assumes a parodistic air, but the parody here is *avant la lettre*, for in the final Adagio, it will be used only for expressive ends.

4. The broad descending phrase on the violins which serves as an introduction to the Finale (Adagio. *Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend* [Very slow and still held back], 4/4, D-flat major), announces two essential motifs, the more important of which is the gruppetto already heard in the slow section of the Rondo. No other composer before Mahler would ever have dared to build an entire movement around so simple a motif. The solemn gravity of the principal theme suggests a hymn ('Nearer my God to thee' has been suggested as a model and Mahler might have heard this hymn in New York), but the obsessive gruppetti in the inner parts in quavers or semiquavers, the very unusual harmonic progression in the middle of Bar 3 of the movement and the countless dissonances disturb the quasi-Brucknerian calm. The second subject is no less striking: it is anticipated in the lowest register of the first bassoon before being stated in full some time later in two voices separated by a yawning void of several octaves. Its simplicity, sobriety and, one might almost say, its unadorned starkness has something frightening about it. These two principal melodic elements are now varied, with the movement as a whole divided into four great sections. Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of all is the way in which the motifs fragment and slowly disintegrate in the coda, with its gently muted strings. By the end, only the gruppetto remains, growing ever slower and ever more hesitant, as if somehow idealised.

The tenderness and limpidity of this ending recall the conclusion not only of *Das Lied von der Erde* but also—across a distance of many years—of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, which Mahler had written at the age of twenty-four. The whole of this final movement, like that of *Das Lied von der Erde*, is imbued with the feeling that God is present in all things and that man aspires to union, not to say fusion, with the consoling world of Nature. The reconciliation between these two worlds—man and Nature—is one that Mahler may well have wanted to suggest in the two main episodes of this final movement and is achieved at the very end of the work, with its sense of acceptance, silence and peace. It is eternal rest, infinitely gentle and fully accepted, that is suggested by what I have termed the final idealisation of the material, notably in the last gruppetto, which may be regarded as an ultimate assertion of expressivity and, hence, of humanity.

Like that of *Das Lied von der Erde*, this ending is in no way pessimistic or tinged with despair. Whether one discovers here a message of hope, a farewell of heartrending tenderness or the serene acceptance of fate, few listeners will deny that this final Adagio brings with it a sense of supreme fulfillment, an ideal catharsis. Fervent in its meditation, it crowns and completes the huge 'novel' in nine chapters, 'full of sound and fury', that constitutes Mahler's oeuvre. Audiences are not mistaken when they feel an exceptional emotional charge as the music fragments and grows ever more rarefied. The work invariably carries the audience with it. It seems to compel its performers to outdo themselves and invites its listeners to feel at one with each other.