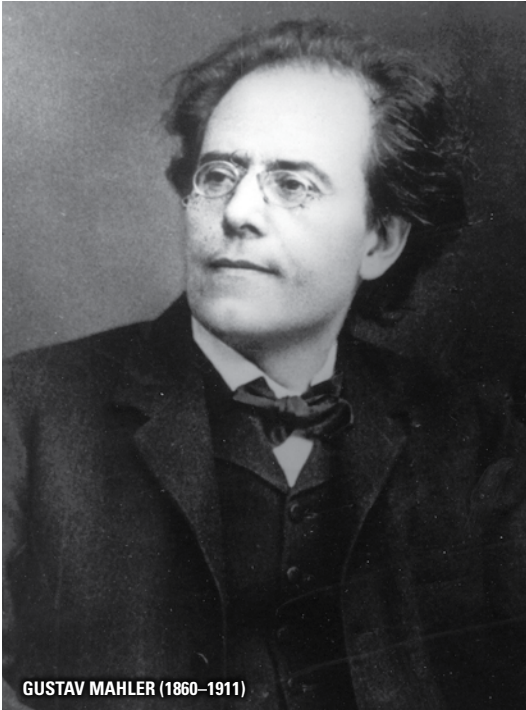




MAHLER

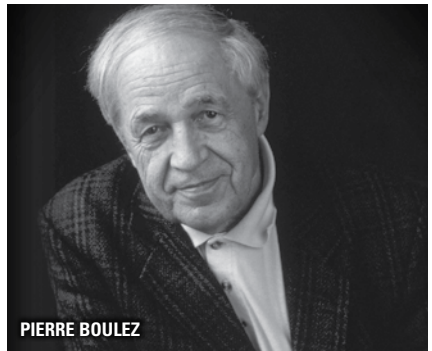
The Symphonies in Sequence



GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)



DANIEL BARENBOIM

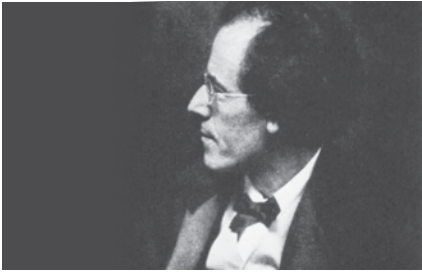


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Musical Reflections on Gustav Mahler



The studying and restudying of a score is demanded not because of any incoherence in it, but precisely because of its inexhaustible expressions of coherence. A piece of music allows for an indefinite range of interpretations, each of which may illuminate, yet none of which exhaust the meaning of the text. For this reason there is a need for perpetual interpretations and reinterpretations, any of which may be competent or correct, but none of which can be final; any given performance presents aspects of the music but never its totality. In the interpretation of music, it is essential that no single aspect of the music or the music making should be unimportant enough not to be dealt with—and the genius of great talent defines itself by the ability and willingness to attach more importance to the smallest detail than is actually necessary—but it must never be an end in itself. It must never become an ideology. Ideology—in other words, the systematization of an idea—deprives it of its very essence because a system is a set of rules that eliminates the necessity for further thought, whereas an idea is in constant development.

The key to understanding the music of Gustav Mahler, in my opinion, lies in his dual craftsmanship as composer and conductor. Mahler was the first composer to create his own particular orchestral sound by isolating the dynamic capacities of each separate group of instruments, assigning contradictory dynamics to different groups

of instruments sometimes playing the same notes simultaneously. In the second movement of the Fifth Symphony, to take a classic example, the clarinets play *fortissimo* and then make a diminuendo while the violas play the same music in *pianissimo* and then make a crescendo. The compound result, a single statement completely transformed in color from beginning to end, is only possible when the dynamics are observed precisely, almost fanatically. The overwhelming number of instructions for dynamics and tempo fluctuations in every score is evidence of Mahler's desire—and ability—to create a structure for the “emotional” elements of sound. However great the temptation may be to enhance this emotionality in Mahler, it is erroneous to believe one is emphasizing the emotional qualities by exaggerating, for example, the barely concealed references to Jewish klezmer music as heard in the third movement of the First Symphony. It is impossible to make more powerful what Mahler himself has so carefully designed. It is worth noting that the word *klezmer* in Yiddish, which derives from the Hebrew *kli zeme*, means simply an instrument of song and must in this sense be equally at home in a street-music band as in a symphony orchestra.

Although it may be undesirable and even contradictory to the composer's intentions to imitate the style of the bands and folk music Mahler quotes, it is of the greatest importance to be familiar with certain conventions of sound production common during his lifetime. One such technique that has fallen entirely into disuse is portamento, the sustained connection of one note to the next on a stringed instrument (*portare*, in Italian, means “to carry”). This type of shift was altered irrevocably by the modern school of violin playing, exemplified by Jascha Heifetz, whose playing was of such intensity that he needed to introduce a new and strident brilliance to the portamento by aiming with great direction and speed for the second note. For the contemporary string player, therefore, the old way

of creating portamento, in which the lower note is sustained and becomes the foundation out of which the slide to the next note arises, is completely foreign, even tasteless. Furthermore, the harmonic implications of the portamento have been lost, a fact that renders its use meaningless in the intended context. Rather than evoking the release of harmonic tension, it becomes simply a means of transportation from one tone to the next. The original portamento is no longer a part of modern schooling and is therefore necessary to discuss and study when performing Mahler, who very often indicated the use of portamento in his scores. The modern string player tends to either ignore this indication or execute it in an erroneous manner.

virtuosic piano music whose musical form and content are closely related. In this way of thinking, Mahler has often been paired with Bruckner. The Wagner influence is obvious in both; the scope and length of the symphonic discourse have many points in common, but serve very different purposes in expressing their respective content. Bruckner's affirmative construction (which to my mind has more in common with an archaeological excavation than with an architectural construction because of the way his symphonies unfold in such a way that additional layers are constantly unearthed) is in complete contrast to Mahler's statements, which often make their first appearances as already deconstructed elements. A comparison with both ninth



Mahler's unique instrumentation, together with that of Richard Strauss, signifies the beginning of a new era in the exploration of color in German music.

The brilliance of Mahler's orchestration demands the virtue of pure expression rather than virtuosity itself. Often the high register of the trumpets and clarinets is an expression of an emotional attribute rather than an athletic demonstration of the capabilities of modern instruments. It is a difficult undertaking to present the symphonic works without either resorting to reckless self-expression and total abandon on the part of the interpreter, or adhering to the details of the score without characterizing each different element present in the music to the utmost.

History has often given us composers in pairs: Handel and Bach, Haydn and Mozart, Schumann and Brahms, Chopin and Liszt, Debussy and Ravel, Bartók and Kodály, Falla and Albeniz. It is much easier to attach more importance to what these composers have in common than to explore the subtlety of their differences. The similarities are obvious but the contrast between Chopin's rigor and Liszt's declamatory style, to take but one example, seems to me more interesting to observe than the fact that both wrote

symphonies shows this very clearly. Bruckner's begins out of nothing and very gradually develops into the grandeur of the complete first statement, the very equivalent of the philosophical concept of becoming rather than being. Mahler's is at the outset already broken up into small units, imparting a feeling of something that was once part of a complete form but now exists only in fragments, leftovers of the grandeur that has not been sustained in its full form. This may explain why for many years conductors chose one composer or the other. Wilhelm Furtwängler, for example, who was a pioneer of Bruckner symphonies and helped establish their original versions as absolutely necessary, regarded Mahler as artificial. Celibidache, another great Bruckner conductor, said "*bei Mahler sind die Empfindungen unecht, deswegen kommen sie immer nur als Zitat*" ("Mahler's emotions are unauthentic, they are always as quotations"). Added to that, Mahler's music is unfortunately still most often discussed not in musical terms but in a psychoanalytical context that explains its neuroses according to the theories of Sigmund

Freud. For a long time I was deterred by these two elements and, believing as I do that the content of music can be expressed only through sound and not in words, came to perform his symphonic works relatively late in life. The songs always seemed to me a more natural form because of the symbiosis between text and music.

Mahler's unique instrumentation, together with that of Richard Strauss, signifies the beginning of a new era in the exploration of color in German music. Mahler had, both literally and figuratively, one foot in the 19th century and the other in the 20th century. In observing composers of the past, there are different criteria in determining their importance: On the one hand there is the simple question of the merit or beauty of a body of work, and on the other its position in the development of music within history. We would undoubtedly be much poorer without the music of Mendelssohn, his Violin Concerto, *Lieder ohne Worte*, Octet, and many other works. The beauty and perfection of his music is obvious and beyond all criticism, but the history of music would have developed in much the same way if Mendelssohn had not existed. Liszt, on the other hand, a composer of genius but perhaps lacking the craftsmanship and perfection of Mendelssohn, influenced tangibly and forcefully the path that music was to take. Berlioz represents a similar case; the influence of these two composers on Richard Wagner is impossible to overestimate and we know that without Wagner there would have been no Bruckner, Strauss, Mahler, or Schoenberg. There are only a handful of composers who summarize—and culminate—the entire period of composition until their time, whilst at the same time showing the path to the future. Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, and Debussy are all examples of this kind of synthesis and historical importance. For his part, Mahler provides the essential link between Wagner and the Second Viennese School. The influence of Wagner and Bruckner are obvious

and yet, in the later works, there is a fragility that must inevitably lead to the breakdown of the tonal system in much the same way that classical painting was broken down into pointillism, cubism, and abstraction.

As an interpreter, one must accept the printed score as the infinite, or final, expression of content and not forget that as performers we are finite or temporary. Therefore, we stand in relation to the score as the finite to the infinite, not only recognizing our indebtedness to it, but trying to overcome this very contradiction. Our own finite essence is precisely—or paradoxically—our striving to exist forever, to become infinite. No human being, unless at the edge of despair, has the free will to cease existing. The score is final but gives us infinite possibilities of realization. Therefore, no performance can be final. It is never once and for all—on the contrary, performances have to have the quality of all for once. We have at our disposal an infinite range of expression under infinite attributes.

The Staatskapelle Berlin was the first orchestra to record a complete Mahler symphony, the Second, under Oskar Fried in 1924. The arrival of the Nazis signified the end of performances of Mahler in Germany. It has been my special joy to bring back and develop the study of these symphonies with the Staatskapelle Berlin.

Pierre Boulez

Mahler Today



How long he took to come back, not from the shadows, but from purgatory! A tenacious purgatory which for a thousand reasons would not let him go. Too much of a conductor, not enough of a composer; in the end, a composer who cannot free himself from the maestro: too much facility, not enough control. And he muddled everything up! Of opera, which he conducted with passion, there is no direct trace in his work; yet in the noble world of symphony he sowed the bad seeds of theatricality: sentimentality, vulgarity, insolent, and unbearable disorder entered this elite world with noise and length. Nevertheless, a handful of fanatics keep watch in this posthumous exile. They can easily be divided into two camps: avant-gardists and conservatives—the latter vaunting to be the true defenders of an opus they consider betrayed by the former.

Next, the mistake of being Jewish at a time of intense nationalism—reducing him to complete silence in his home country—the memory of this “impurity” wanes to the point of disappearance. Furthermore, this mythology, where Bruckner and Mahler unremittently recur as the Castor and Pollux of symphony. After Beethoven, impossible to go further than to the ninth: The symphonic dynasty is doomed by destiny whenever it dares to overcome the fateful figure. (Less talented composers have since succeeded in this exploit ...) The memory of a musician, prodigious and uneasy, demanding and eccentric. Some of his scores, the shortest, easy to understand, acceptable.

For many years, this little bit sufficed. The traditional symphonic appetite was sated by other movements—less complex, less demanding. No supporters emerged after the rare performances, leaving doubts not only about the worth, but also about the quality of the undertaking. On the other hand, modernity passed him by, only to leave him with the leftovers of an outdated romanticism looked upon with smug pity. In this fin de siècle, everything was going in the opposite direction: excessive abundances in everything, while everyone else was more and more severely fixated on economy. Abundance of time, abundance of instruments, abundance of sentiments, of gestures ... form collapses under these excesses! What is the worth of a music in which the rapport of ideas to form is lost in the quagmires of expressivity?

We meet a world that is coming to its end, gluttonizing on plenty, suffocated with plethora: Smugness and sentimental Apoplexia are the best and worst that can happen to it. Farewell, bloated and degenerated romanticism! Farewell? When works decide to survive, there is no Farewell ... Do you repudiate them? Abruptly? Well, they argue to stay! Superbly!

And now, purification having had its day, it left some real skeletons along the way. Out of this long inattention the work's authentic quality reappears, forcing us to reconsider, insistently interrogating us about our negligence. What were we? Guilty or superficial? Do we have any excuses to bring forward? This oeuvre has been presented to us in a way that could inspire a great degree of wariness. It was certainly treasured by devout hands. Devout but also rapacious hands that lacked that generosity that opens the future by means of the past—hands trammelled by faithfulness (at what point is fidelity turning into treason?). Our wariness could even make us suspect the composers of the Viennese School of sentimental localism. At first glance, the bonds weren't that visible—but opposition was, it was fragrant.

However, as modernity ended its asceticism, luxuriance returned to consciousness with persistence—so much that a retrospective exploration started, enriched with new perspectives, whereas the mind, warned by contemporary experiences, stayed armed with a bitterly acquired acuity. Perception—probably saturated with simple meanings and bored with lopsided significations—starts dreaming of ambiguity, longing for a world where categories aren't that simple anymore, longing for a world where categories aren't so simple that one can easily find one's way. And order? Why this restrictive concept! Let's flout all restrictive conceptions: order, homogeneity of ideas, style, legibility of structures.

For a certain time let's put aside these paralyzing rules. But is it that easy? Certainly not! This is especially so when one doesn't want to be influenced by external circumstances. In this particular case, it is difficult to escape the legend that obstinately amalgamates life and work, direct experience and artistic accomplishment, melodrama and agony! Let's give enthusiastic exegesis what's due to it and let's confront ourselves directly with the heterogeneous, unequal monuments Mahler left us.

One first ambiguity provokes uneasiness: The borderline between sentimentality and irony, between nostalgia and criticism—a borderline sometimes impossible to define. It's not so much about a true contradiction, but more about a pendular movement, a sudden change of illumination that, as soon as it passes this difficult prism, transforms certain musical ideas—usually considered to be well-worn and superfluous—into indispensable revelations. The banality once reproached him—to the point of considering it a lack of inventiveness; do we still feel this banality as being unbearable? Isn't it the origin of a large misunderstanding concerning his popularity? "First degree"—listening is often based on easygoing clichés, on sweetish hits and insipid phrases, a quickly waning landscape, a past kept in

vignettes. Some are delighted, others annoyed—and both are equally hindered to transcend this primary appearance, which happens to be only the antechamber ... True, this material exists. To us, it may sometimes seem limited, foreseeable to the utmost; from work to work, the source of inspiration hardly changes. When we cite the march and all its military and funerary derivations, the dances in three-quarter time—ländler, waltz, or minuet, the regional and parochial folkloristic inventory—we roughly circumscribe this as a "borrowed" and easily traceable theme. A palpable constant, from the first to the last opus: clichés inherited from the cultural or from the menial past. Opposing this reservoir of "banalities," the reservoir of mighty theatrical gestures: heroic and sublime—a music of spheres and of infiniteness; a dimension of grandiosity, about which can be said, in the least, that it lost its urgency.

But where does this come from? That these gestures, dead in the works of other composers, still keep their moving emotional force in Mahler's work? Isn't it so, that these gestures, far from being triumphant, camouflage insecurity in the highest degree? How distant now that self-confident romanticism, once so proud of its own heroic valor! And how far back the naivete of the first approaches to popular sources.

There's homesickness in Mahler's world, an undeniable nostalgia; yet it shares, willy-nilly, its terrain with criticism, sarcasm even. Sarcasm? Isn't it the most unmusical of all characters? Music loves undisguised, genuine values; it doesn't lend itself easily to double-cross irony and sincerity! Impossible to be sure: Is it truth, is it caricature? Orientation would be easy if combined with lyrics; but in "pure" music?

Ambiguity, mockery can only be truly understood against the background of a text based upon accepted, recognized conventions. To play this seesaw game it's often enough to simply distort conventions—through exaggerated or

displaced accentuation, using anomalous, prismatic, decomposing instrumentation, by compressed and protracted tempos. In its aggressiveness, the humor goes as far as to enwrap everything in a surreal, eldritch color, until the subject-matter is x-rayed, presenting us that sooty arborescence that alerts and agitates us: a world of fleshless, clacking bones, realistically described through bizarreness, let's plainly say, preposterous, grotesque combinations of sound, a world arisen from a nightmare, ready to dwindle back down in it; a colorless world of shadows—a cinder-world without substance. How avidly grasped and vigorously captured is this spectral universe where memory is frayed!

What *is* it that's attracting us? Just the bizarre, sentimental, or sarcastic reflexes of a sinking world a man was able to capture with lucidity? Could this be enough to grab and enthrall our attention? Nowadays, all fascination is certainly deriving from that keen hypnotic ability of a vision that embraced with passion the end of an era—an era that inevitably must die, so that a new one may emerge from its annihilation: This music is portraying nearly too literally the myth of the Phoenix.

Meanwhile—beyond this crepuscular substance—more surprising is the upheaval he brings into the symphonic world. With what resoluteness, with what savageness sometimes, is he attacking the formal hierarchy of these forms! Forms which, up to his day, had indeed been amplified, but frozen in rigid and decorative conventions. Was it theater that pushed him towards a dramatic devastation of constraining forms? Like Wagner—who reversed the artificial world of opera just to arouse an infinitely more “demiurgical” proceeding in music drama—Mahler turns upside down the symphony, ravaging this too well-ordered terrain by interfusing his phantoms into the sanctum of logic. Wouldn't Beethoven be the true example to evoke? That barbarian who, in his time, had profusely disseminated

disorder and bafflement, an example too for the dilation, beyond “rationality,” of the forms he could take as models?

Is it possible to talk about an extra-musical dimension? One hasn't failed to do so, and the programs written by Mahler—later highly regretted by him—started the misunderstanding. Descriptive intention would be neither an innovation, nor a personal characteristic; on the contrary: It would be more the mark of an epoch, which—after Berlioz and Liszt—pleased itself to excite musical imagination largely through imagery, literature in the first place, but equally borrowed from visual arts, inadequately competing, on an unequal terrain, with “painting.”

Mahler's extra-musical dimension quits this landscape of assimilation only to impinge upon the very substance of music, its organization, its structure, and its power. His vision and his method possess the epic dimension of a narrator; procedure and material links him, above all, to the novelist. The title of *Symphony* remains; the principles of the movements subsist: scherzo, slow movement, finale, albeit their number and their order are constantly changing from one composition to another.

The oftentimes repeated intrusion, at various moments, of the vocal universe within the symphony, the inclusion of theatrical effects by means of instruments placed outside the stage, are all elements that erode the limitations of a well-defined genre. Only the novelistic universe has enough freedom to afford such a game with the material employed and with the way it is employed. Freed from visual theater—his professional obsession—Mahler virtually abandons himself frenetically to this liberty of mixing all genres; he refuses to distinguish between noble and other materials, merging all the source material available to him, building up a structure certainly examined with care, but freed from inadequate formal limitations. Quite unconcerned about homogeneity and

hierarchy, absurd definitions in this case, he communicates to us his vision with all its nobility, triviality, tension, loosening. He doesn't choose from this abundance because choosing would mean betrayal, to renounce his primordial plan.

And thus, while listening, we find different ways of listening to the musical process. At first, there's a persisting impression that the proper musical form is incapable of holding up to such an accumulation of facts. That the narration—the musical one, I insist—seems to trail away in useless meandering. It appears as if the surcharged orateness erases the intention: That form is dissolving in this complexity; that direction is seemingly disappearing under endlessly multiplying insertions; that overflowing movements

would be exhausting or boring. (If this problem is faced by the listener, even more so for the interpreter: The only difference is in acuity and foresight.) Referring to classical architecture, with its reliable benchmarks, is useless. What's needed is to imbibe the density of the musical events, the density of musical time, which changes between relaxation and tension, following the demands of the dramatic circumstance.

Certainly, this malleability of musical time is fundamental in all music, but it isn't the primal phenomenon of perception. With Mahler, however, it constantly tends to be so, often enough forging ahead of all other categories, guiding and helping us to discern between what's better to be easily heard and



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collapse beneath this rhetorical excess and the abundance of material.

A listening that was strictly musical would concede to such arguments. But then, how shall we listen? How shall we perceive? Is it enough to—and may we—let narration carry us away, going along with the psychological flow, not letting ourselves be distraught by detail in order to concentrate on the epic dimension and the verve it gives to our imagination? Yes, we may!

The power of this music is sufficient enough to accommodate the passive listener. But is this truly enriching? The ideal would be an exact following of the density of the narration. What hasn't been said about Mahler's protracted lengths! If, with Schubert, it's called *himmlische Länge* ("celestial lengths") [quoting Stravinsky: "One goes to sleep with Schubert only to awake in heaven"], what expression should be invented to describe the formidable dimension of time dominating certain movements in Mahler's symphonies? Only a misguided listening of this immense expansion

what should be perceived with a nearly analytical acuity. It's this ductility of musical time that helps us to sound out the different narrative levels and to instantly classify the narration's proliferation. One must adapt one's hearing to the inside of the movements themselves—especially concerning large epic movements. But within the symphony itself, each movement also requires a specific quality of listening, due to a distinct aesthetic posture between them, their importance—or rather their density—differing within the general arrangement. It's a non-homogeneous universe, if there is one, that risks incoherency, including citation and parody as legitimate methods. The world of Mahler reinstructs us to listen in a manner more varied, more ambiguous and richer.

What curious extremes is Mahler's entire work presenting: one goes from the far too short *Lied* to the excessively long symphony. There are no in-between works! One may be amazed ... One may even prefer the instantaneous, the immediate perfection—without any problem—of the sharp-sighted

transcription that characterizes his short *Lieder*. Why then this protraction, this amplification, this stretching, when the essential idea has already been expressed? And yet—as perfect as the conciseness of his “poems” may be—Mahler’s true dimension reveals itself in those long, excessive, sometimes problematic movements, just because the difficult struggle with the epic dimension appears to be more fascinating than a success within dimensions too visibly contoured by the limitations of a well-defined genre.

Mahler would probably be less appealing if he wasn’t also, sometimes, difficult. His “hyper-dimensional” approach has very little to do with that sated fin-de-siècle pleasure in orotundity, megalomania’s gigantism and the zenith of opulence. Rather a demiurgic anxiety becomes apparent: the fear of arousing a world which proliferates beyond any rational control; the upcoming of a vertiginous inebriation caused by the creation of a work, where accordance and contradiction rank equal; the discontentment with the acknowledged dimensions of musical experience; the search of a less evidently established and complaisantly accepted order.

The ideal piece of work eludes all well-defined categories, rejecting them as such, but still participating in each of them. On the crossroad of an imaginary theater, an imaginary novel, an imaginary poem, the symphony becomes the meeting place *par excellence*. Musical expression demands everything that’s denied it. By deciding to accept all eventualities and potentials of being, it becomes truly philosophical—while escaping the constraints of pure verbal transmission.

The ambition of the idea and the economy of means—are they compatible? Is auditory asceticism possible in such a concept? Of course, we know that rules and discipline can achieve remarkable results, and that the more the spirit penetrates into the depths of

invention, the less it needs, perhaps, the readily available external device; rejecting the apparent richness in order to attain the profound communion in which the means of communication become utterly irrelevant. Perfectly mastered, the aural material finds itself thrown not only into the most modest of roles, but also doted with the most uncommon of attributes: absence! Music for contemplation, a book of meditation, a song for itself, to communicate beyond sound’s reality. This is nothing new: Bach, certainly, and Beethoven, who couldn’t bear the “wretched violin,” perhaps. In contrast, Wagner still rejoices—in the depths of his reflection—in sonorous profusion and instrumental plenitude: purified, clarified, transparent, but still there, underlying, forcefully, underpinning the very essence of expression. How could this example be forgotten, this amalgam, this fusion within musical thought—concept and means?

With Mahler, didn’t the means take a disproportional place vis-à-vis the concept? Didn’t he push his own ability to the point of abusiveness, reduced to a seductive, but vain virtuosity? The immediate reactions to his works are nearly all like this: They praised or criticized the virtuosity or the eccentricity. His skillfulness is never contested. He is blamed, however, of masking a lack of substance and content. He is accused of diverting attention, deflecting musical perception towards the superficial and the superfluous.

Mahler, the conductor; doesn’t he have that fault considered inherent in the interpreter: to camouflage the absence of originality in the conception—or, at best, its incertitude—by a manipulation for which his profession, almost unduly, provides him with all the means? We resent this hybrid breed for knowing too well how to manipulate. We easily declare it guilty of cheating, treason even.

Yes, there is virtuosity of sound with Mahler. Constantly visible, rarely conspicuous. Even when he becomes conventional, it’s mostly by pulling all the

stops of invention in a superb manner. Undoubtedly, this music is placed within a well-outlined historical perspective. Parting from such a strict point of view, it's not even exploring absolutely unknown territory. It accepts—if only to transgress it—romantic instrumental practices that had gradually become the standards of the 19th century; the predilection, alone, for the French horn would be sufficient to confirm this, if there weren't already enough other characteristic clues to prove this mindset. The adroitness of the instrumentation is so great that it could be easily confounded with nonchalance, if the extreme meticulousness of the transcription did not constantly remind us to stay vigilant.

Mahler is obsessed, not without cause, with his notation's effectiveness; as a conductor he had experienced, often-times, how "permissively" instrumentalists read the indications and how "freely" they reproduced them, how often they were even ignored—by sheer unresponsiveness or by pure laziness. In his notation, he fights as best as he can against inertia and passiveness, against formed habits, mechanical and "natural" reactions. Aware, as he was, of the ambiguity his musical material sometimes carried, sliding between irony and sentimentality, he is unceasingly warning, calling to order. It's his indomitable personal voice that speaks out of his numerous indications, equally positive and negative: He gives the impulse and revives the critical sense, exhorting, encouraging, and holding back. First, what's necessary to do, is to know what's *not to do*: The required quality is a result of avoiding the mistake. In truth, what he's doing is to include the interpreter's scheme into the scheme of composition to a degree unknown to composers before him. He incorporates the interpreter's requirements into the invention's course without being tyrannically determined by them, because he dominates them well enough not to settle for what exists. On the contrary, he rather anticipates what's possible, by means of extension and enhancement.

It's this, and not any empty virtuosity, that reveals the professional interpreter: The man that was in daily contact both with the grandeur of a passionate profession and the meticulous tasks and obligations of a constricting technique.

This is the reason why there's the belief that the exigency of the score would lead to a rigid interpretation of the notation; that the living authority would posthumously become constraining; that accuracy and correctness would be sufficient to understand a philosophy of moving extremes; that mere objective observance of rules could replace the "re-creation" of a powerful subjectivity. All this creates an immeasurable distance, a distance that servility without imagination will never transcend.

If Mahler is cautioning, he never acts to inhibit his interpreter. After what we know, he himself was not in the least struck by this tendency to inhibition. On the contrary, in fact. However, he couldn't accept to confuse "interpretation" with inexactness: The most demanding liberty requires precisely the most severe discipline. Without this, it would be reduced to caricature, contented with approximations—a somewhat unpolished travesty of an otherwise profound and respectable truth! The more so, because an abandon to frenzy, or even the hysteria of the moment, leaves the primordial motivation plundered, destroying the ambiguity essential to this music. In such a case, one would render it eminently trivial and one would empty it of its profound content. Moreover, one destroys the fundamental structure that balances every moment of development, making it a chaotic jaunt of a befuddled jack-of-all-trades!

Mahler's magnetic fields are infinitely subtler than the coarse display of filings. The difficulty of reading Mahler consists undoubtedly in the discrepancy between gesture and material. The gesture tends to become increasingly "grandiose" while the material tends to become more and more "vulgar." This incoherency is born

equally in this fundamental contradiction as well as the impossibility of joining end to end the multiple moments of the course of events in the composition itself. This approach multiplies the musical ideas around a few fundamental polarities.

The more one advances within the composition, the more one sees the texture acquiring density, not so much by its thickness, but more by the multiplicity of lines: Polyphony develops through a constant and continuous crisscrossing, where the elements increasingly attach themselves to a determining idea: not elements of filler or complementarity, but cells derived from the principal themes. To conciliate the meticulousness of the detail with the grandeur of the design, this is what can't be easily achieved and, yet, this is what restores the unstable balance of forces within the work's invention; the difficulty of apprehending these opposed dimensions, forcing them to coincide according to a shared perspective, posed Mahler the same problems it poses us, problems that define the most profound and personal character of his music.

That such a work took its time to convince doesn't seem unjustified nowadays. Abundance and excess may seduce us more today than in times past, recalling an opulence forgotten or rejected as being superfluous and impure. This simplistic reaction alone wouldn't justify the growing attraction to this work once rejected for its ambiguity—this ambiguity that, today, is esteemed. Still, attaching this work to the "progressive" movement leading directly towards, and at the same level as, the Viennese School would be reading more into the things than they actually signify.

There's too much nostalgia in Mahler, too much attachment to the past to make of him, without reservation, a revolutionary starting an irreversible process of radical renewal. This is what his first adepts clearly felt, who attached themselves, above all, to this nostalgia:

They saw the sentimental aspect, but refused the critical aspect that should have made them ill at ease. There is, on the other hand, such an obstinate will to override the categories of the past, forcing them to express things for which they were never destined. There is such persistence in extending the limits, that it isn't possible to confine Mahler to a characterization of "end of a race." He contributes, in his own personal way, to the future. Today—stylistic notions having been purged, leaving us confronted with a more composite language, a more complex expression and a more open synthesis—this contribution appears more evident.

Allowedly, his inspirational sources, the very geography of these sources, may seem closely circumscribed, enclosed in a world that—far from evolving—stays obsessively fixated on certain means of expression, reflecting an inevitably dying form of society. Since, practically, these sources no longer exist, we're able to consider them, calmly, as valid testimonies we cannot immediately understand. Consequently, this material becomes valuable as a record, and, instead of repudiating it, we may consider it as the starting point of the creation. Hence, we're able to attach ourselves almost exclusively to the transformation, the transmutation. Throughout the work, we follow the evolution of the expression created from identical source elements serving as essential points of reference. The scope and complexity of gesture, as well as the variety and intensity in the degrees of invention, this is what makes Mahler contemporary. This is what makes him indispensable to present-day contemplation on the future of music.

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