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THE SONG OF MAHLER'S NINTH

Randall Keith Horton

How is it that my first experience of hearing Mahler's Ninth Symphony in a 2005 performance at Carnegie Hall has resulted in the privilege of writing this article? More importantly: why, in the one hundred years since Bruno Walter premiered the Ninth (1912, Vienna), has no recognition emerged regarding the arguably most important musical mystery contained beneath the surface of this symphony's Finale?

I charge—and completely understand—that it is highly unlikely that one could have heard this "silent" musical catalyst to which I refer unless one had first gained familiarity with it as a song, i.e., as a Mahler, in fact, *intend* for this mystery song to remain submerged, unheard and unseen? We cannot know. Whatever the answer, my life has changed because of the revelation of its discovery. Its hidden presence is entirely consistent with similar applications of song form in Mahler's previous compositional oeuvre. My musical life, thus, is now dedicated to researching "The Song of Mahler's Ninth."

A new member of GMSNY, I am a retired church and synagogue musician; hence, my forty-year experience of living with hymns and other sacred music. As a Fellow in the January 2005 Orchestra Management Seminar of the League of American Orchestras, I attended a Philadelphia Orchestra performance of the Ninth at Carnegie Hall, conducted by Christoph Eschenbach. As the orchestra performed the Finale, the *Adagio* movement, I repeatedly heard the *complete* Protestant hymn melody, "Abide with Me (Eventide)," tacitly present—embedded—and recurrently progressing throughout the movement in widely varying harmonic contexts. The breathless experience of it riveted me to my seat.

Seminar Fellows visited Maestro Eschenbach immediately after the performance. I asked him if the hymn is embedded in the movement. He smiled affirmatively, but I still am not sure if he understood my question: Does the *entire* hymn melody *tacitly*—and *repeatedly*—support specific sections of the movement? Of course, I assumed that his affirmative nod confirmed my experience; however, seven years of searching for a definitive answer to my inquiry have, to date, yielded no prior research or analysis supporting or confirming my assertion that the complete hymn melody is subliminally present. I have therefore matriculated toward the Master of Arts degree in music theory at Queens College, CUNY, in a deep search to find my answer. In January, 2012, the Greater New York Chapter of the American Musicological Society honored me by authorizing presentation of my early findings; in May, 2012 at a CUNY Graduate Center seminar, I was privileged to present a Schenkerian analysis of the relationship between the hymn and the first three strophes in the Finale; and presently I thank Mr. Lewis M. Smoley, President, and other officers of the GMSNY for authorizing both this article and my forthcoming 13 November 2012 presentation.

My brief correspondences with Dr. Henry-Louis de La Grange, and with Professor Stephen E. Hefling, have provided very helpful guidance in my search. I am grateful for each of their responses to my inquiries. Before initiating contact with him, I reviewed de La Grange's examples of similarities between the theme at the opening of the Finale (Ex. 33, m. 3-4) [HLG4, p. 1443] and the hymn, (Ex. 34, m. 1-4) [ibid.]. De La Grange also cites musicologist, Deryck Cooke: "for British audiences theme A (Ex. 33) is 'utterly banal' because it *resembles a well-known Victorian hymn tune* (Ex. 34, "Abide with Me"; all italics mine).

In Ex. 34 and footnote 275 (pp. 1443 – 44 n), de La Grange credits, "William Henry Monk (1823–89), [as] the *author of the hymn* [who] was an English organist, choirmaster, and composer of a great many popular hymn *tunes*, of which 'Abide with Me' remains the best known. However, the original harmonization (I, II, V, I), which is banal, *has nothing in common with Mahler's*." In the same footnote, he continues, "To this author it appears possible that Mahler heard this hymn, which is also well known in America, sung below his windows at Hotel Majestic [NYC] in February 1908 during the ceremony held in memory of Deputy Fire Chief Krueger (p. 1444n)."

When I wrote to Dr. de La Grange through an acquaintance who is his close friend, I was quite reticent in presenting my thoughts. I showed, among other interrelationships, examples of the structurally congruent relationships between the hymn and the Finale, and thanked him for the honor and privilege of submitting work for his review. His response was entirely gracious; his questions were pointed, and have provided highly valued insight for my research.

De LaGrange's footnoted reference to W.H. Monk establishes him as the composer of the hymn *melody*. The author of the hymn *text* was the Reverend Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847), who had been pastor of All Saints Episcopal Church in Devonshire (England), and who wrote the hymn text as he was dying of tuberculosis. He died three weeks after completing the text. This fact should not be lost on those who consider the subject matter of the text—solace

in the face of life's vicissitudes, and in the face of death itself: Can the poetic impetus of "Abide with Me" therefore be understood as the genesis for musical metaphor in the Finale of Mahler's last completed work?

I will suggest exactly such a quasi-programmatic influence, including a history of the hymn, in my November presentation. Please visit the website www.gmahler9adagio.net: I have super-imposed the hymn melody where it is sub-structural to the first three rondo sections (and an orchestral transition) in the Finale. On Track 1, the first realized melody becomes briefly *dissonant*, and is set over the first rondo section. I suggest that Mahler is word-painting here, metaphorically transforming the hymn text. Tracks 2 and 3 provide the second and third realizations, set over the next two rondos (variations). Track 3 then dovetails into an orchestral transition, over which the fourth realization is super-imposed. These consistently congruent structural relationships between the embedded hymn and the Finale rondos (and the transition) would appear to be no mere coincidence [LBGM].

The hymn melody is also *traceable within the orchestral texture,* either in exact unison pitch-class contexts, or in what would have been contrapuntal passages, had the hymn melody been audible (which, of course, it is not). Later rondo/variation passages reveal similar melodic relationships between the imagined hymn melody and Mahler's score. These contrapuntal relationships modulate frequently, and become highly dissonant. Each, however, as rondo, is always appropriately approached and resolved: in D Flat major. Each of the six occurrences of the submerged hymn melody will eventually be similarly posted to the site [LBGM].

Mahler is unlikely to have heard the hymn in Roman Catholic Vienna prior to his 1907 emigration to New York. Dr. Hefling informed me (in an email message of 5/23/11) that: "The hymn was extremely popular in England and America, but I have not yet found evidence that it was widely known in German-speaking lands—which may account for why German and Austrian scholars have not picked up on this." The hymn had been published in German translation in 1897, in the United States (it is No. 140 in *Evangeliums-Lieder*, edited by Walter Rauschenbusch and Ira D. Sankey. The publisher was Biglow & Main of New York) [WREL].

Professor Hefling's annotated footnotes in his chapter, "The Ninth Symphony," in *The Mahler Companion*, show that the hymnbook, *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, which included "Abide with Me," had, by 1912, sold sixty million copies in three editions after its first publication in 1861 [MNMC,p. 486n]. He also informed me that: "After writing that chapter, however, I found that Mahler had actually sketched the opening of what became the main theme in the finale of the Ninth much earlier, in a sketchbook for the Seventh Symphony that must date chiefly from the summer on 1905.… So the kernel of this idea was in the back of Mahler's mind well before he came to New York (December 1907), where he would have been most likely to encounter 'Abide with Me' [for the first time]." Mahler composed the Ninth in 1909–10.

Hefling notes the similarities between this 1905 melodic/harmonic sketch—the "motto theme" and "motto progression"—and the

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'Lebewohl' motive and harmonies from the opening and second phrase of Beethoven's Sonata in E Flat, Op. 81a [MNMC, p. 473-74: Ex. 20. 2; p. 481-82: Ex. 20. 8; 20. 9]. He referred me to his chapter, "'Ihm in die Lieder zu blicken': Mahler's Seventh Symphony sketchbook" in his edited volume, *Mahler Studies*, where he discusses the "motto progression", and provides a facsimile of the 1905 sketch [SHMS, pp. 191 - 94]. Hefling is showing that the motto theme and motto progression, in their melodic and/ or harmonic settings, are the kernels from which the *entire Ninth Symphony* was composed; but he also shows that scholars disagree regarding Mahler's source: The 1905 sketch would seem to prove that Beethoven—not the hymn, which was probably first heard by Mahler in 1908 (de La Grange)—is the likely source of inspiration for the motto theme and progression.

The late Christopher Orlo Lewis confirms that the motto theme "can be traced … to the principal theme of the first movement… the version [of the motto theme/progression] given by the waltz … *directly foreshadows the theme of the Finale* … the long-term significance lies in the chord progression [motto progression] as well as the melodic outline [motto theme], and *extends over three movements* … there are *explicit occurrences of the idea in the third movement* … and *throughout* the fourth [Finale]. But the *harmonic* idea [motto progression] is in fact crucial to all four movements…. The [motto theme] originates in the development section of the *Andante Comodo* [CLTC, p. 50]."

1905 might not preclude 1908 as an important marker, however, if Mahler, indeed, did hear the hymn in New York in February 1908. If he did not, then 1908 is still important: Nicholas Tawa writes, in *From Psalm to Symphony, A History of Music in New England*, "Amazingly enough, the Metropolitan Opera Company produced [Frederick Shepherd Convers' opera, The Pipe of Desire] on 18 March 1910. According to a report in the *Boston Evening Transcript*, 10 October 1908, it was Gustav Mahler, the great Viennese composer and conductor, who was responsible for the selection of this opera over those of other Americans for performance at the Metropolitan [NTPS, p. 247]."

Tawa continues: "The moral of the opera is heard [quoted in part here], 'There is a God whose laws unchanging'" (the libretto is by Boston architect, George Edward Burton). Tawa cites the 1910 premiere as "One of the most arresting events in the history of American art music (p. 247)." Gilbert Chase, in *America's Music, From the Pilgrims to the Present*, further clarifies (quoting Edward

Ellsworth Hipsher), "' "The Pipe of Desire" has the distinction for all time of having been not only the first American Opera to be presented at the Metropolitan Opera House but also the first opera to be sung there in English during the regular season.' A doubleheader! [GCAM, p. 543]."

So Mahler was obviously attuned to American religious texts in 1908 when he chose to program the 1910 premiere of the opera at the Met. In his first year of life and work in America, he might have heard "Abide with Me" for the first time (February, 1908). In the meantime (1909–10), throughout his last completed work, he might have utilized and re-harmonized the initial motive—the "motto theme and progression"—from the hymn; or was it borrowed from Beethoven, exclusively?

Protestant religious music had been "in the air" from the early-American Colonial experience through the nineteenth century, when "New England" composers had interpreted psalms, hymns and other American folk music in their symphonic and chamber works. As a composer, Mahler was gaining recognition in the New World: his Fourth Symphony had been premiered in New York (1904); his Fifth in Cincinnati (1905) and in Boston (1906) [KPMW, pp. 239 – 53].

As an erudite artist within his new American social milieu, Mahler could not have escaped the ubiquitous presence of religious folk music in the New World—and I doubt that he was unaware of Dvorak's "Symphony from the New World," from 1893: the composers were colleagues. Mahler had corresponded with Dvorak and conducted Dvorak's music (but detested his symphonies!). Was Mahler challenged to create his *own* new symphony from *his* New World experience, utilizing, as would have been consistent with his previous compositional practice, a religious folk song—a hymn—as a poetic/musical source?

New York, while professionally challenging to his new life as an emigrant artist, had provided a needed change: in 1907, his precious daughter had died; his heart condition was discovered; his resignation from Vienna Court Opera had been difficult; and his marriage was beginning to feel the strains that led to later trauma. The hymn's poetry (which he would not have heard in Vienna) provides personal solace. Beethoven's 'Lebewohl' motive, already familiar to Mahler, closely resembles the opening motive of the hymn. His experience in America was, indeed, intrinsic to the composition of his Ninth Symphony.

In the Finale of the Ninth, Mahler repeatedly transformed the entire hymn melody—and, possibly, the hymn text, with its end-of-life poetic supplications—into a type of personal symphonic song and metaphor, the mysteries of which are at once traceable and unfathomable: the Song of Mahler's Ninth, as a tacit musical catalyst, is the recurring hymn, "Abide with Me." The hymn is contained beneath the surface with reverentially influential significance known only to the composer. I look forward to exploring this mystery in my November presentation.

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WREL
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REVIEW OF RECENT RECORDINGS

Lewis M. Smoley

A few important Mahler recordings appeared since the last issue of Wunderhorn. *Particularly significant are the first commercial release of the first two symphonies performed in 1942 by the New York Philharmonic under Bruno Walter; two splendid Ninths—one with the Bavarian Radio Symphony conducted by Bernard Haitink, and another with Bernstein leading the Israel Philharmonic in 1985; and a thrilling DVD of the Eighth from Riccardo Chailly with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and local choral ensembles. Several conductors have ventured for the first time into the wondrous world of Mahler's symphonies, such as Yakov Kreizberg, Hans Graf, Hansjörg Albrecht, François-Xavier Roth and Mark Gorenstein, while others, such as Jonathan Nott, Manfred Honeck, Markus Stenz and Gabriel Feltz, continue with their projected complete cycles.*

Symphony No. 1

New York Philharmonic, Bruno Walter, conductor (October 25, 1942). 2-Music & Arts CD-1264 [51:22]

With this release, we now have nine Firsts under Walter's baton, more than with any other conductor! Only his 1939 performance with the NBC Symphony—the earliest Mahler First on disc—predates this one. Fast tempi are more vigorous and flexible than either of his two commercial recordings: a 1954 performance with the New York Philharmonic, and a 1961 studio recording with the Columbia Symphony. A few interesting touches in the 1942 reading distinguish it from the later commercial releases: heightened contrasts in mood and temperament; more frequent mannerisms; hyper-tense energy levels in the outer movements; and eliminating the repeat in the second movement as well as in the first. Some creative details also appear here, but not in the 1961 performance: repeated cuckoo calls in the first movement have an echo-like effect; trombones and tuba growl fiercely as the music approaches an enormous orchestral outburst; high-level energy and intensity make the opening of the finale truly sound like a raging storm; and, in the same movement, a weightier closing section (from the segment marked "Triumphal" *(pesante)* enhances its dramatic impact. Despite some spotty playing and technical glitches, this is an important release that may be more indicative of Walter's approach to the First than his commercial recording.

SWR Symphony Orchestra of Baden-Baden and Freiburg, Francois-Xavier Roth, conductor. Hänssler Classic 93-294 [53:10]

Last year Francois-Xavier Roth succeeded the noted Mahlerian conductor Michael Gielen as principal conductor of the Baden-Baden/Freiburg Radio Orchestra. If this recording, his first of a Mahler symphony, is any indication of Roth's interpretive perspective, it does not bode well. From overly long fermatas and excessive swells in woodwinds during the opening of the first movement to blaring high volume and a galloping pace of the closing moments of the finale, there is little here to make a positive impression. Although devoid of mannerisms, tempi occasionally become either too sluggish (e.g., before the horn trio at 11:15 of the first movement) or lack consistency (the pace set for the brief reprise of material from the symphony's opening during the finale bears no resemblance to its first appearance). Orchestra and conductor are not always in sync (e.g., from around 12:50 in the first movement). Roth overplays his hand in trying to capture the rustic character of the second movement, forcing the *ländler* to sound excessively coarse. A brisk trio is light and airy but virtually shorn of its lyrical beauty. After a rather uninteresting third movement, the finale begins with a very loud timpani roll, followed by a stiff, four-square treatment of the storm music. Roth tries to generate more urgency during the long approach to the reprise of the first subject and breezes through the trumpet's quiet initial statement of the heroic theme (after 9'). A full cutoff before the huge D major orchestral outburst undermines its shock value. Heavy percussion sometimes drowns out the rest of the orchestra. After a perfunctory nod to the *pesante* marking at the segment marked "Triumphal" which begins the closing section, and a messy orchestral explosion, Roth suddenly changes the pacing to a gallop, with the obtrusively loud timpani leading the way. Speaking of the timpani, what are they playing at the end of the long roll before the final snap?!

Symphony No. 2

Nadine Connor, soprano; Mona Paulee, mezzo-soprano; Westminster Choir, New York Philharmonic (January 25, 1942). 2-Music & Arts CD-1264 [79:33]

Coupled with Walter's 1942 performance of the First Symphony (reviewed above), this Second is the earliest one we have from Walter (nearly six years before his Vienna concert and fifteen years before his only commercial recording with the NYP). One immediately noticeable difference between the NYP performance and this one is that Walter used an English translation of the texts in the latter. Although his interpretation changed little over the years between these two performances, the earlier is more impressive for the most part. Despite occasional intonation problems and a few technical glitches and miscues (e.g., the early entrance of the clarinet at 6:45 of the third movement), the orchestra plays with great power and intensity. Listen to the *molto pesante* section of the first movement (14:48 to 15:16) or the magnificent apotheosis that ends the symphony (from 11:40 of disc 2/track 6). Walter makes the beginning of the symphony sound even more majestic than in the 1957 recording. He chooses an allegro tempo for the descending triplets with which the first movement ends, instead of Tempo I (much slower) which he used in the commercial recording. The two vocal soloists and the chorus (the latter also in the 1957 release) sing their collective hearts out in a magnificent conclusion to this impressive performance. Mahlerians and Walterians should not be without it.

Symphony No. 3

Michaela Schuster, alto; Women and Boys of the Cologne Church Choir; Women's Chorus of the Cologne Opera, Gürzenich Orchestra, Cologne, Markus Stenz, conductor. 2-Oehms OC 648 [94:03]

Stenz delivers another outstanding performance in his traversal of the Mahler symphonies. Orchestral playing is impressive throughout; instrumental balances excellent; clarity incisive and revealing; and sonics bright and forward with well-honed bass response. Interpretatively, the approach is traditional with well-considered tempi and sound structural coordination. Volume levels are hyped up during climactic sections in the outer movements and close miking throughout wreaks havoc with balances. In the first movement, the Pan march swaggers along with confidence and vitality, and horns play as one in a thrilling opening to the recapitulation. A breezy main tempo in the second movement heightens its playful character. The "animals" of the third movement sometimes sound ferocious, especially in the trombones and horns toward the close. Cuckoo calls that appear before the first posthorn segment play slightly out of tempo, as if imitating the piccolo's inebriated twittering in the first movement. Although the alto is in fine voice in the Nietzsche movement, giving the impression of a Sybil uttering profound pronouncements, she is too far forward, thus undermining the music's spaciousness needed to create a mystical atmosphere. Lip slurs (*naturlaut*) on the oboe don't quite work. Stenz choses a fairly brisk tempo for the finale. But he gives due weight to the three climaxes during which the dark forces of the first movement try to break through. The closing section is simply magnificent.

Symphony No. 4

Sunhae Im, soprano, Pittsburgh Symphony, Manfred Honeck, conductor. Exton EXCL-00048 [57:40]

Honeck has a tendency to set brisk tempi and hurry forward awkwardly, causing disruptive tempo adjustments, particularly during the first and third movements. Brass overpower during climaxes in the third movement, causing them to sound blatant, if not pretentious. Overemphatic accentuation is a characteristic of Honeck's general approach, as if force-feeding the musical line. In the third movement, an added timpani stroke at the end of the big dive (around 12:20) is an unnecessary intrusion that Mahler was intelligent enough to avoid.

Jeannette Wernecke, soprano, Stuttgart Philharmonic, Gabriel Feltz, conductor. Dreyer Gaido 21072 [58:44]

This wayward performance, replete with both technical and interpretive flaws, would normally not merit a review, but for the fact that it is the fifth recording (!) in a projected complete symphony cycle by these performers, on a label with apparently very limited distribution. Most disturbing is the self-indulgent manner of Feltz's treatment of tempi. Few conductors of this symphony take so many liberties with Mahler's tempo markings. For example, around 9:10' in the first movement, Feltz completely loses track of the main tempo, causing numerous adjustments in a freewheeling, willful and disoriented approach. Lyrical material sometimes suffers from gushing effusiveness. Feltz appears unconcerned about structural cohesion or tempo consistency throughout. The third movement plods along mercilessly, both robbing the main theme of its *cantabile* character and making the music sound more comatose than restful. During more passionate sections, strings virtually ooze with passion and winds (bludgeoned at times by timpani) project a dark, even tragic character. The girlish soprano might have been a bright spot had her low range not been so pinched, and had she tried to make anything of what she was singing. Poorly spliced edits are embarrassingly audible.

Symphony No. 5

Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Yakov Kreizberg, conductor. OPMC 066 [74:53]

The untimely death of the Austrian-American conductor Yakov Kreizberg last year abruptly ended a promising career. This was his only Mahler symphony recording. However, too many problems do not reveal evidence of what might have been an important Mahler conductor. Kreizberg concentrates on precision; although certainly understandable, given the limitations of this ensemble, such emphasis on exactitude robs the performance of any sense of spontaneity. He also makes too many adjustments in both tempi and dynamic levels, using excess caution in the former and succumbing to lack of control in the latter. The first movement comes off well for the most part, but stress on technical mechanics debilitates the thrust of the second, at least until Kreizberg pulls out the stops for both the tragic *wuchtig* climax (11:35 et seq.) and the Grand Chorale (12:56). In the succeeding three movements, caution again results in stiffness and sluggishness, particularly disturbing in the middle movement, robbed of its light-hearted character. Kreizberg tries too hard to keep the *adagietto*'s principal tempo moving, thus playing up the more passionate moments and glossing through the passages of tender expression. Despite some finely honed string playing, the finale lacks a *giocoso* spirit, sounding half-hearted and unconvincing.

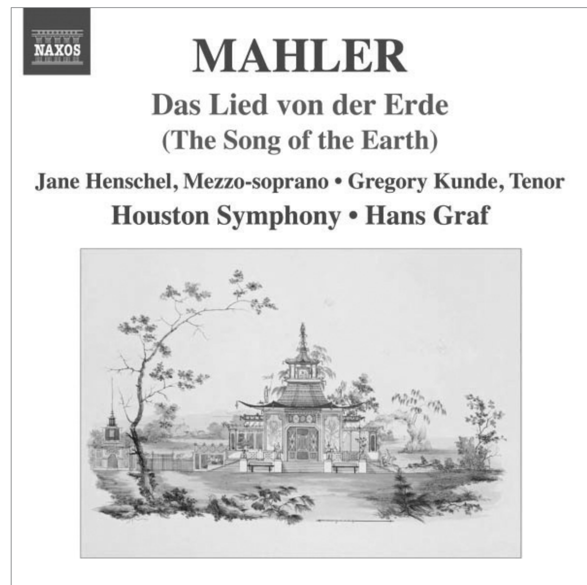
Pittsburgh Symphony, Manfred Honeck, conductor. Exton OVCL-00460 [73:58]

Honeck seems more concerned about imposing questionable nuances throughout this performance than providing either a cohesive approach or communicating the various expressive characteristics of the music. For example, he tempers the violent anger of the second movement, making it sound merely glum, and completely debilitates the fun-loving energy of the middle movement into a tame, self-conscious display of *faux* Viennese *gemut*. Only in the *adagietto*, does he create an appropriately dreamy, bittersweet quality tinged of nostalgic longing. From the weak entry of the solo horn at the opening of the finale, and an almost inaudible echo of its A by the strings (as if carried over from the end of the *adagietto*), Honeck takes his time getting into the spirit of the music. In fact, only during the closing section does its *joie de vivre* come through. Honeck fusses with scraps of the music in a rather gimmicky manner (e.g., adding a cutesy hesitation to a clarinet phrase at 2:39'). Horns often sound bland and woodwinds lines are occasionally subjected to awkward rubato phrasing. Even when the music itself might stir up some more enthusiasm from the players, the orchestra still sounds too temperate and uninvolved. Honeck's flexible tempi create a push-pull effect that disturbs the musical flow. Only into the Grand Chorale does the performance come alive, as if calculated to make a big impression on its own. But when the spirit moves Honeck, he can pull out the stops, as he does during the closing moments.

Symphony No. 7

Bamberg Symphony, Jonathan Nott, conductor. Tudor 7176 [79:50]

Jonathan Nott turns in another impressive performance of this difficult and seriously misunderstood work. Although his opening tempo is sluggish, it provides a strong contrast with the exuberant allegro Nott sets for the main tempo of the finale. Nott's respectful attention to detail, evident here, has become an important characteristic of his Mahlerian style; but his treatment never sounds pedestrian or merely studious. A shadowy atmosphere emerges during the opening movement (e.g., c. 11'), enhancing the purported



imagery of 'night'. During the coda, the dark side of the tenor horn theme merges with a vibrant, demonstrative main theme, giving the impression of fulfillment. A nightmarish quality pervades the second movement, enhanced by strong accents that create the effect of 'things that go bump in the night.' By contrast, the parody of the Third Symphony's Pan march that occurs in this movement is full of spirit and yet tautly incisive. Dotted rhythms are sometimes given full value and elsewhere clipped, even when they are not written that way in the score. Pointed *sforzandi* in the interwoven triplet runs of the third movement's first subject highlight its spooky character. Nott's tempo for the *andante amoroso* movement is a perfect compromise between Horenstein's brisk pace and Bernstein's more relaxed stride, thus treating the music as a romantic serenade, rather than a parody of it. The finale makes the strongest impression. From the emphatic timpani solo that opens the movement to the fun-loving way that Nott jockeys back and forth between march and minuet during the closing section, this is a rare example of a performance that understands and can communicate Mahler's parodistic humor and deliciously impish wit with aplomb.

Symphony No. 8

Erika Sunnegårdh, Ricarda Merbeth, Christine Oelze, sopranos; Lioba Braun, Gerhild Romberger, altos; Stephen Gould, tenor; Dietrich Henschel, baritone; Georg Zeppenfeld, bass; MDR Rudfunkchor; Chor de Roper Leipzig; Gewandhaus Chor; Thomanerchor Leipzig; Gewandhaus Kinderchor; Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, Riccardo Chailly, conductor. Accentus Music DVD ACC 20222.

Chailly and his Leipzig forces provide a basically sound, sometimes impressive performance, enhanced by excellent choral singing, fine balancing of orchestral and choral forces, and a serviceable group of vocal soloists. After a strong and vital opening, Chailly sets a rather broad main tempo that gradually begins to lose impulse until the beginning of the development. Vocal soloists are up front and closely miked, so that they are too loud during quieter passages, such as during the *Infirma* subject. Strings sound marvelous in the *praevio*, and the double fugue prior to the recapitulation is magnificent. Chailly opts to hold back into the recapitulation, recalling Bernstein's approach. Trumpets and trombones are placed 'on the heights' during the closing *Gloria*, to bolster its dramatic power, but inner voices here dissolve into the general din. Part II is structurally cohesive, Chailly navigating successfully through the maze of progressive variations that work their way to the Chorus Mysticus. Tenor Stephen Gould has the vocal power and breadth sufficient to handle the challenging Doctor Marianus role. The vision of Mater Gloriosa (where she only appears but doesn't sing) is handled with visual as well as orchestral beauty, the music floating delicately as if on a billowy cloud. But at the height of her solo, she is forced to interpolate her high B-flat down to a middle D. After a heavenly bridge passage, the Chorus Mysticus is simply exquisite and the closing section nothing less than magnificent.

Das Lied von der Erde

Jane Henschel, mezzo-soprano; Gregory Kunde, tenor, Houston Symphony, Hans Graf, conductor. Naxos 8.572498 [62:46]

For those who prefer the nobility and dramatic presence of Bruno Walter in this work, this recording is for you. For the most part, Graf takes the great Mahler conductor's approach to tempo, character and expressivity, making for a generally satisfying performance. Tenor Gregory Kunde's full-throated, characterful singing in both 'drinking songs' (*Trinklied* and *trunkene*) is impressive. He really makes the graveyard scene in the former sound terrifying (listen to how he emphasizes the G-sharp on the word *hinausgellt*) and imbues the latter with a flippant, devil-may-care attitude that is a perfect foil for the serious final that follows. Mezzo Jane Henschel is captivating in *der Abschied*, singing with warmth and tenderness. An ominous atmosphere pervades the first, its underlying impulse slackening during the beginning of the development. The final *ewigs* really do seem to fade into the ether. For a budget label recording, it's quite a bargain.

Sibylla Rubens, soprano; Renée Morloc, alto; Markus Schäfer, tenor; Markus Eiche, baritone; Munich-Bach Orchestra, Hansjörg Albrecht, conductor. Oehms OC 792 [62:25]

In an apparent attempt to 'resolve' the question of which voices to use in this work, conductor Albrecht creates his own version, with a soprano replacing the tenor in *der Jungend* and a baritone singing only *der Abschied*. Some slight touches in instrumentation are also made, though of little significance. But the problem with this performance is not the singers *per se*, but Albrecht's stifling restraint in both tension and dramatic character. Notwithstanding a strong reading of the 'graveyard' scene in the *Trinklied*, the rest of the movement is simply a wash out. The alto's rather matronly voice doesn't produce the right color for the *Herbst* movement, which fails to elicit an *ermüdet* (tired) quality that should evoke a feeling of *ennui*. Although the idea of replacing the tenor with a soprano for *der Jungend* is intriguing, there is no apparent reason for ignoring Mahler's designation of a tenor here. Best is the characterful singing of the tenor in the *trunkene* movement, who gives a bravura performance that sends caution to the winds. Close mic-ing of both the baritone soloist and woodwind instruments detracts from what should be a veiled, mysterious atmosphere in *der Abschied*. One minor annoyance is the way the baritone insists on adding a crescendo at the end of long, sustained tones and treating passages (around 12') in an operatic style, making them sound like segmented arias. Simply said, the conductor's 'revisions' provide little reason to acquire this often stilted, middling performance.

Symphony No. 9

Bavarian Radio Symphony, Bernard Haitink, conductor. Br KlassiK 900113. [79:53]

I have always considered the 1969 Haitink/Concertgebouw recording of the 9th to be one of the best ever made. Although the BRSO is not as highly polished as the Concertgebouw, it is an excellent orchestra and performs brilliantly here. Haitink's moderate, basically temperate approach has not changed since the Concertgebouw release. As in the earlier performance, he captures the mood of each movement brilliantly, engendering a feeling of wistful nostalgia in the first movement, until it darkens and becomes frightening during an increasingly intense struggle to sustain life; creating a perfect contrast between the naïve, bumptious *ländler* and the brashly arrogant waltz in the second movement; giving the character of a furious 'dance with the devil' to the scherzo subject of the third

movement; and evoking the impression of an aged person fervently praying for redemption from the struggles of life in the finale. No other conductor has so successfully fused these extremely diverse movements into a cohesive whole as brilliantly as Haitink. In the first movement, listen to how disheartening the horns sound during the climax around 12:35, or how the trombones and tuba roar like monstrous demons during the climax of the development, evoking a sense of hopelessness; or how willfully the violins shunt aside the woodwinds' vain attempt to intrude upon the waltz by butting in with scraps of the *ländler* (4:10); or how meekly the oboes make another attempt to insert the *ländler* theme around 13'. Haitink's finale doesn't gush with passion, but nevertheless it is forcefully expressive without becoming maudlin, and softer, more spacious passages communicate with a simple, unaffected naturalism. Clarity is remarkable for letting no important inner voice be either lost or exaggerated. Undoubtedly, this Ninth is a worthy nominee for the best Mahler recording of the year.

Israel Philharmonic, Leonard Bernstein, conductor. (1985) 2-Helicon 02-9656.

Despite some patchy playing, Bernstein induces the orchestra to play with commitment, vibrancy and assertiveness, resulting in an impressive performance. LB had a profound and intuitive understanding of the underlying meaning of the Ninth, so virtually any performance of it he gave sounded fresh and spontaneous. A dreamy quality haunts the quieter moments of the first movement, while aggressive intensity drives the music to a spectacular outburst on the opening motto at the end of the development (from 18:45). Tempi are just flexible enough to enhance expressivity without becoming awkwardly maudlin. Bernstein elicits high spirits during the second movement, imbuing the *ländler* theme a playfully rustic character. The contrasting waltz theme starts almost reluctantly, but soon becomes more aggressive and even arrogant, as might be expected of the *ländler*'s antagonist. Bernstein is marvelous at evoking interesting characterful effects, which never seem forced but always natural and idiomatic. He whips up the orchestra to a frenzy in a riotous conclusion to the scherzo movement. A long-lined but prayer-like theme, with strong though not particularly sharp accentuation, begins the finale. Playing is fervent and impassioned. Just listen to the climbing series of falling seconds in the strings from 3:43, as they hold back with each step upward until taking a huge leap downward in a devastating despair; or the touching expression of soulful tenderness with which the exposition ends. Although the opening of the development should have been softer, Bernstein builds tension to an overwhelming climax, notwithstanding a dishy-sounding cymbal crash at its height. During the final measures, diving *portamenti* simply melt the heart!

State Symphony Orchestra of Russia, Mark Gorenstein, conductor. 2-MDG 648 1719 [95:01]

Although the orchestra is far from top drawer, lacking precision, polish and heft, and sonic levels are often constricted, Gorenstein occasionally provides some interesting nuances that show promise in his first Mahler symphony recording. For example, in the first movement, just a dash of heartbreak taints the angular second theme and a slight hold back into the climax at 14:29 generates a real sense of collapse; in the second movement, despite a trudging *ländler*, Gorenstein imbues its reprise (from 14') with a touch of

sorrow, as if bemoaning its having to concede defeat to the waltz theme. Long ritards make the trio of the *Burleske* sound labored. Strong emphasis on the many accented 'turn' figures in the first theme of the finale make up for the strings' occasional lack of sufficient dynamic thrust. After a heartbreaking horn solo (after 8:25), Gorenstein suffuses the second theme with a sense of world-weariness, exquisitely shaping each phrase. Fearlessly, he holds back during the end of the exposition to allow its poignant character to emerge with deepest expressivity. How tenderly the strings lament life's passing in the final measures.

SOCIETY NOTES

July 7 usually happens to be one of the hottest and steamiest days of the summer, and such was the case, once again, this year, when about 30 members and guests gathered to celebrate Mahler's birthday. The festivities took place in the cool and spacious private dining room of Fagiolini on 40th. Alexandra Fendrick, an original member of the Mahler Society, was honored for her many years of service as Treasurer and for her long and faithful membership.

Our first program of the fall season, on September 27, featured two speakers: Stephen Hefling, Professor of Music at Case Western Reserve University, presented a fascinating look at Justine Mahler's Faust Notebook, with handwritten notes on Goethe's great work, and discussed the influence of the work on Mahler in the composition of the Eighth Symphony; and Caroline Kita, professor at the College of the Holy Cross, spoke on the friendship between Siegfried Lipiner and Mahler, and the former's influence on the composer.

On October 11, Deborah Kirshner, violinist and author, discussed her novella "Mahler's Lament," a multi-layered portrayal of the composer at a turbulent point in his career.

Stephen Hefling, Caroline Kita, & GMSNY President Lewis M. Smoley

Please save the dates for our next two programs: on Tuesday, November 13, Randall Keith Horton will present his paper on the little-explored topic of the hymn "Abide with Me" and its relationship to Mahler's Ninth Symphony; on Thursday, December 13, conductor Andrew Litton will engage in a musical conversation. Both programs will be held at the 3 West Club, 3 West 51st Street, at 7:30 pm.

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