

**Session I: 10:00–12:15 p.m.**  
**Mahler's Performances in New York**

**Chair: Vera Micznik (University of British Columbia)**

Mahler Conducts Mahler: Performances in New York, 1908–1911  
Marilyn L. McCoy (Columbia University and Barnard College)

Upon their arrival in New York on December 22, 1907, Gustav and Alma Mahler were mobbed by reporters and photographers. Though the conductor refrained from giving any details about his new role at the Metropolitan Opera, he let slip an intriguing comment: "I shall probably give concerts, and perhaps perform one or another of my own symphonies as well [as conduct opera]. But I don't have any plans—for everything always turns out differently."

Mahler's coy remark proved to be more prescient than he had expected. After withdrawing from the Met at the end of his first season (1907–08), he began his second (1908–09) as director of the New York Symphony Orchestra, which eventually became the New York Philharmonic. By his third season (1909–10) he had formed a congenial bond with his ensemble, and declared in a letter that "throughout my life I have wanted to conduct a concert orchestra. I am happy that for once in my life I am able to enjoy this...."

During his time in New York, the composer introduced four of his works to American ears: the Second Symphony (December 1908), the First (December 1909), the *Kindertotenlieder* (January 1910), and the Fourth (January 1911). As documentary records suggest, his conviction that "America...has no idea what to make of me" was unexpectedly liberating. Finding it easy to ignore sniping music critics, Mahler could present his music to the general public without worrying whether it would be understood, allowing him both to enjoy their applause, and to hear his own works anew from the podium, startled by their audacity as they sounded in real time, shaped by his own hands.

**Mahler Arrives, Wagner Revives**  
**Anna Stoll Knecht (Accademia Teatro Dimitri)**

Shortly after Gustav Mahler had left Vienna for New York in December 1907, he made his Metropolitan Opera debut with Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, on 1 January 1908. This paper will discuss the details, reception and controversies surrounding this production, particularly in comparison with the pathbreaking Viennese *Tristan* that Mahler directed in 1903 with designer Alfred Roller, and within the broader context of Mahler conducting Wagner programs.

Mahler's "Proms:" Programming Beethoven in New York  
Eveline Nikkels (Gustav Mahler Stichting, Amsterdam, Netherlands)

It is interesting to see that Mahler took his "educational" work as conductor very seriously. In order to show his favorite composers at their best, he organized concerts that we would now call now "Proms"—for instance, an all-Beethoven or an all-Wagner program. As for the latter, since he could not conduct Wagner's *Ring* at the opera after his first season (1907–08), he took parts from this cycle that he considered to be the most "symphonic" and combined them with other Wagner repertoire. Of course, he also promoted his own music as well as the music of his friend and colleague Richard Strauss, all in order to show the audience the direction European music had taken since the days of Johann Sebastian Bach.

**Session II: 2:15–4:30 p.m.**  
**Mahler's Relationships with the New York Press, His Players, and His Wife**

**Chair: Marilyn L. McCoy (Columbia University and Barnard College)**

"Where Is the American Folk-Song?" Mahler's Interview in *The Etude*  
Morten Solvik (IES Abroad Vienna, Austria)

One of the most problematic texts associated with Gustav Mahler is an interview he gave to the American periodical *The Etude* in 1910. Entitled "The Influence of the Folk-Song on German Musical Art," Mahler reflected on the crucial role of traditional melodies in the creation of high musical art: "So it is in music, that the songs which a child assimilates in his youth will determine his musical manhood." Having found his compositional voice in the folkish allusions of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and similarly idiomatic gestures in his symphonic music, Mahler was clearly fixated on the ethnographic origins of his own creations.

The matter turned highly problematic, however, in applying this model of artistic maturation to American musical culture. To Mahler's ears, the native music and popular tunes he heard in the New World were "crude" and insufficient in providing a foundation for the work of a "great master." The time was simply not ripe and the raw materials unsuited.

We can forgive Mahler his lack of foresight into the future of a nation that in the decades that followed would come to dominate cultural life around the world. But what are we to make of the patronizing tone, the unmistakable European bias, and even the racial prejudice inherent in his outlook? This paper places Mahler's statements in a broader context by looking at the reception of American musical culture in Europe and particularly in Vienna at the turn of the century in an attempt to trace the origins of his views and his particular use of language.

Mahler the Conductor  
Sybille Werner (Gustav Mahler Music Weeks, Toblach, Italy)

While much has been written about Gustav Mahler's performances and interpretations, much less is known about his relationship with the orchestra. Based on written sources and the interviews William Malloch conducted with New York musicians who played under Mahler, a picture emerges of the orchestras of the time, of his interaction with the musicians on and off the podium, of his demands and rehearsal technique, and of the results he achieved.

"What Does this Sphinx-Snail Mean?": A Brief Correspondence between  
Alma and Gustav Mahler Near the End of His Life  
Stephen E. Hefling (Case Western University)

This paper presents a brief but poignant written exchange, previously unknown, between Gustav and Alma Mahler during the last weeks of his life. In it Mahler alludes to the bacteria that had infected his heart and bloodstream: his bacterial endocarditis had been affirmatively diagnosed through blood cultures made four days after he took to his bed following what turned out to be his final concert. Mahler apparently initiated the dialogue after he had experienced a crisis while Alma was out of the apartment. His annotations suggest several aspects of his attitude towards his illness, and may reflect his late-life interest in the philosophical writings of Eduard von Hartmann. Apparently, having recorded his thoughts, he fell asleep, leaving the sheet of notepaper on his nightstand. Rather than waking him, Alma responded on the verso of the sheet with comments that, given her recent and ongoing involvement with the architect Walter Gropius, raise perplexing questions about her devotion to her husband and her paramour.