

Symphony No. 10 by Gustav Mahler

by Michael Steinberg

Adagio

Scherzo: Fast quarter-notes

Purgatorio: Allegretto moderato

[Scherzo]: With greatest vehemence

Finale: Slow (but not dragging)

Although some of the ideas go back to 1908, Mahler did most of the work on this unfinished symphony in the summer of 1910, completing the work in short score, but leaving a fully orchestrated score only of the first movement and the first twenty-eight measures of the third. Most conductors still prefer to perform the Adagio alone; however, the second performing version of the complete five-movement work by the English writer Deryck Cooke has been often heard and several times recorded. In 1994, a more recent performing version by an American musician, Remo Mazzetti, Jr., thanks to the advocacy of Leonard Slatkin began to achieve some circulation and was recorded. There are also versions by Joe Wheeler, an Englishman, Clinton Carpenter, an American, and Hans Wollschläger, a German.

The first attempt at preparing a practical full score was undertaken by the composer Ernst Krenek in 1924. He presented the first and third movements only, and these sections were performed on 14 October 1924 by Franz Schalk and the Vienna Philharmonic. Alban Berg had gone through Krenek's score and offered criticisms, though these seem not to have been taken into account; yet the first performance did incorporate some re-touchings by Alexander von Zemlinsky and Schalk himself. Deryck Cooke began work on his score in 1959 in connection with the impending Mahler centenary, and on 19 December 1960, Berthold Goldschmidt, who had assisted Cooke, conducted a partial performance with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London. This was a lecture-demonstration for radio, but the objections of Mahler's widow, Alma Mahler Werfel, to any sort of "completion" had to be overcome before there could be a full performance. This, though not easy, was accomplished in 1963, and on 13 August 1964, Goldschmidt and the London Symphony gave the first complete performance of Cooke's score. One who was not satisfied was Cooke himself. With the assistance of two young composers, the brothers Colin and David Matthews, he prepared what he called his "finally revised full-length performing version"—generally known as Cooke II—and this was introduced, also in London, on 15 October 1972 by Wyn Morris and the New Philharmonia.

Having begun to think in 1980 about preparing his own performing version of the Mahler Tenth, Mazzetti began to undertake the task seriously in 1983, completing it two years later. The first three movements were performed by Gaetano Delogu and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic on 14 November 1986 as part of a symposium on the work at Utrecht. The full premiere was given by the same orchestra and conductor, again in Utrecht, on 3 February 1989. The Mahler-Mazzetti score is dedicated to the late American Mahler scholar and devotee Jack Diether.

To make this essay broadly useful, I have avoided specific references to Cooke's and Mazzetti's orchestrations as much as possible. Mahler-Cooke II calls for four flutes (fourth doubling piccolo), four oboes (fourth doubling English horn), four clarinets (fourth doubling E-flat clarinet) and bass clarinet, four bassoons (third and fourth doubling contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, four trombones, bass tuba, timpani (two players), bass drum, large double-sided military drum with a diameter of at least 80 centimeters (31½ inches), snare drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, birch brush (Rute), xylophone, glockenspiel, harp, and strings. Mahler-Mazzetti is essentially the same, but omits the xylophone and Rute, and calls for two harps.

When Bruno Walter conducted the posthumous premieres of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* in Munich in November 1911 and the Symphony No. 9 in Vienna in June 1912, it seemed that all of Mahler's music had been offered to the public. It was assumed that the Tenth Symphony

was in too fragmentary a state ever to be performed, and word went about that Mahler had asked his wife to destroy whatever drafts remained. Mahler's biographer Richard Specht wrote about the "gaiety" and "exuberance" of the music, but his wording makes it plain that he had not actually seen the score and did not expect to; his source for this description was Alma.

In 1912, Arnold Schoenberg, that paradoxical confluence of the rational and the mystic, wrote: We shall know as little about what [Mahler's] Tenth (for which, as also in the case of Beethoven's, sketches exist) would have said as we know about Beethoven's Tenth or Bruckner's. It seems that the Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must die. It seems as if something might be imparted to us in the Tenth which we ought not yet to know, for we are not yet ready. Those who have written a Ninth stood too near the hereafter. Perhaps the riddles of this world would be solved if one of those who knew them were to write a Tenth. And that is probably not going to happen.

Mahler, for that matter, had his own misgivings about going beyond the Ninth. He had called *Das Lied von der Erde* a symphony without numbering it, so that the symphony he called No. 9 was actually his tenth. Thus he had dealt with "the limit" by circumvention, or so he believed. With ten symphonies completed (counting *Das Lied*), he moved virtually without pause, fearlessly and with white-hot energy, from the last pages of the official No. 9 to the first of No. 10. In 1911, the discovery of penicillin was still seventeen years away. Had that antibiotic been available to combat his blood infection, there is little doubt that he would have finished his work-in-progress that summer.

Schoenberg's Mahler/Beethoven parallel was inapt because he had no idea how far Mahler had actually progressed on his Tenth. Only Mahler's widow had any idea until 1924, when she asked the twenty-three-year-old composer Ernst Krenek, then just married to the Mahlers' nineteen-year-old daughter Anna, to "complete" the symphony. Krenek felt this to be an "obviously impossible" assignment, and, as he said later, an "intermediate solution" like Cooke's did not occur to him. The upshot was that Krenek prepared a practical full score of two movements, the Adagio, which was complete, and *Purgatorio*, which was nearly complete. At the same time, Alma Mahler Gropius, as she then was, allowed the Viennese publisher Paul Zsolnay (a future husband of Anna Mahler Krenek) to publish a large part of Mahler's manuscript in facsimile.

She had done this on Specht's advice, and it was a surprising decision. In his Mahler biography, passing on what little he knew about the Tenth, Specht had mentioned "mysterious superscriptions [that] hover between the notes." Such superscriptions do indeed exist, but they are not so much "mysterious" as explicit and exceedingly painful. Gustav Mahler, in 1910, was a man in torment, for he believed himself on the point of losing his intensely beloved, very much younger, bright and lively, beguilingly beautiful wife. Alma Maria Schindler, born 31 August 1879, met Mahler in November 1901, became pregnant, and married him four months later. Their marriage was a mixture of passionate mutual devotion and fundamental out-of-tuneness. Eight years into it, Alma, flirtatious by temperament and frustrated by Gustav's sexual withdrawal from her, was restless, and in May 1910, at a spa in Tobelbad just southwest of Graz, she met Walter Gropius, four years her junior and about to embark on one of the most distinguished careers in the history of architecture. Under trying and even bizarre circumstances—Gropius had by accident (!) addressed the letter in which he invited Alma to leave Gustav to "Herr Direktor Mahler"—Alma chose to stay with her husband, who later told her that if she had left him then, "I would simply have gone out, like a torch deprived of air." The verbal exclamations that Mahler scattered through the score of the Tenth Symphony are reflections of this crisis, and it cannot have been easy for Alma to agree to the publication of such painfully intimate material. As we have seen, she still had qualms about it as late as the 1960's.

The so-called Krenek edition of the *Adagio* and *Purgatorio*, long the only available performing edition of any music from the Tenth Symphony, lacked too much both of science and art to be satisfactory; in any event, with the appearance in 1964 of the Adagio in the critical Mahler edition and that of Cooke II in 1976, it has to all intents and purposes dropped

out of circulation. Moreover, the pairing of the intense and expansive Adagio with the epigrammatic *Purgatorio* made a puzzling impression in performance, and without any knowledge of Mahler's intentions as to context it was hard to know what to make of *Purgatorio* at all.

It was again Specht who suggested, after studying the facsimile, that it was a mistake to assume that all that could be done about the Tenth Symphony had been done, and he urged that "some musician of high standing, devoted to Mahler, and intimate with his style" should prepare a performable full score of the entire work. He named Schoenberg as a likely candidate. For a long time nothing happened. In 1942, the Canadian-born Mahler scholar Jack Diether tried in vain to interest Shostakovich in the task. Seven years later, when the fruitless correspondence with Shostakovich had come to an end, Diether also suggested to Alma Mahler Werfel that Schoenberg be approached. "I'll ask him," she said. Diether reported that "she then invited both of us to her next salon, and during the evening she showed the manuscript to Schoenberg, who took it aside for an hour or so in her study, then returned to the parlor to express his regrets." Schoenberg was then seventy-five and had eye problems so severe that even work on his own compositions had become nearly impossible for him. He of course met all of Specht's criteria; however, as we know not only from his recompositions of Monn and Handel but also from his orchestrations of Bach and Brahms, he was temperamentally incapable of dealing with someone else's score in a spirit that was not assertively his own.

We are inconsistent in our feelings about what to do with unfinished compositions. We seem to prefer Bach's Art of Fugue to stop where Bach's blindness and last illness halted his hand, but for two centuries we have accepted "completions" in various degrees of competence of Mozart's Requiem. At the premiere of Turandot, Toscanini refused to proceed beyond what had been written by Puccini himself, but ever since, the work has flourished with the robustly workman-like conclusion by Franco Alfano. Friedrich Cerha's realization of Act 3 of Berg's Lulu—more a secretarial than a creative task—has been accepted, but continuations and "completions" by Peter Gülke and Brian Newbould of some of Schubert's unfinished symphonies (but not including the Unfinished) have met with skepticism.

Some considerable voices, including those of Bruno Walter, Leonard Bernstein, Rafael Kubelik, Pierre Boulez, and Erwin Ratz (chief editor for the International Mahler Society), have spoken out against the "complete" Mahler Tenth. In the November 1978 issue of 19th-Century Music, Richard Swift, writing from a scholarly composer's point of view, cogently states the case against discounting what Mahler might yet have done between "the stage that the work had reached" when he died and his final fair copy. (What adds interest to Swift's article is that, while he has a strong objection in principle, he in fact admires much of Cooke's work.) Yet, if we accept Cooke's score on Cooke's terms—and, mutatis mutandis, Mazzetti's—as a "performing version" of a draft that Mahler would undoubtedly have "elaborated, refined and perfected . . . in a thousand details," in which he would also "no doubt, have expanded, contracted, redispensed, added, or canceled a passage here and there," and where he would "finally, of course, have embodied the result in his own incomparable orchestration," we have before us something of the greatest significance both as a document and as a monument.

Having a Mahler Tenth adds a great human and musical experience to our lives, and that is the first and obvious argument pro. The last movement particularly speaks for itself in this respect. Knowing this music also alters our perception of Mahler's life work. To a large extent because of the powerful influence of Alma Mahler, we have been taught to see this as tending toward a conscious, death-possessed farewell in the last song—its very name is *Der Abschied* (The Farewell)—of *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Symphony No. 9. But it is clear that Mahler in no way thought of that last heart-wrenching *Adagissimo* as the final page of his letter to the world. Ken Russell's film fantasy on Mahler is an assailable interpretation of the composer's life and work, but it contains some ringing truths: one of them—it is factually quite wrong—is the last shot, showing Mahler arriving in Paris from America in March 1911, confidently exclaiming to the waiting reporters, "I'm going to live forever!" The Tenth, on which Mahler excitedly embarked as soon as he

could after completing the Ninth, is, for all the tragic elements in the verbal glosses and the music itself, is also informed by the gaiety and exuberance about which Specht had written, as well as by profound serenity at its close.

In the Tenth Symphony, Mahler returned to the symmetrical five-movement design he had used in his Fifth and Seventh and in the original version of the First. This idea was not clear to Mahler to begin with, and the crossing out of numbers and of designations like "Finale" on the folders that contain the material for the several movements indicates that he changed his mind more than once about their order within the whole.

He wrote "Adagio" on the folder that contains the music for the first movement, but he does not enter that tempo—nor, for that matter, the main key, F-sharp major—until measure 16. He begins, rather, with one of the world's great upheaves: a pianissimo Andante for the violas alone, probing, wandering, surprising, shedding a muted light on many harmonic regions, slowing almost to a halt, finally and unexpectedly opening the gates to the Adagio proper. This is a melody of wide range and great intensity—piano, but warm, is Mahler's instruction to the violins—enriched by counterpoint from the violas and horn, becoming a duet with the second violins, returning eventually to the world of the opening music.

These two tempi and characters comprise the material for this movement. A dramatic dislocation into B major (Mahler notates it as C-flat, which makes it look more distant), with sustained brass chords and sweeping broken-chord figurations in strings and harp, brings about a crisis, the trumpet screaming a long high A, the orchestra seeking to suffocate it in a terrifying series of massively dense and dissonant chords. Fragments and reminiscences, finally an immensely spacious, gloriously scored cadence, bring the music to a close.

The second movement is a scherzo on a large scale in F-sharp minor: the folder still bears the designation "Scherzo-Finale." It moves in rapid quarter-notes, and its most immediately distinctive feature is the constant change of meter—3/2, 2/2, 5/4, 2/2, 3/4, and so on—that jolts the pulse in nearly every measure. Here is one of Mahler's most astonishing leaps into the future, and even so great a conductor as Mahler himself would have had to acquire some new techniques to manage this exceedingly difficult music in performance. Only the scene of Tristan's delirium would have come even close in his conducting experience. The trio, in a slower lander tempo, is a variation of the melody of the Adagio. There is a shorter second interlude under chains of trills. At the end, the mordantly sardonic character of the opening is translated into the gaiety and exuberance which Specht cites.

Mahler sometimes divided his symphonies into two main *Abteilungen* or sections; following that lead, Cooke proposes a major break at the end of the second movement. Another reading of the musical material, however, suggests that the third movement is a miniature pendant to or variation of what immediately precedes it, the relationship being much like that of the first two movements of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata. The dominance in both of Mahler's movements of the interval of a third—major in the second movement and minor in the third—is a striking and certainly audible connection. Mahler labeled this movement *Purgatorio* oder *Inferno*, later striking out *Inferno* with a heavy zigzag line. The ghostly and whirring texture recalls *Das irdische Leben* (Earthly Life) in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a song with which it also shares the key of B-flat minor. The main tempo is *allegretto moderato*, and the movement is a tiny da capo form.

Here is where the verbal superscriptions in the manuscript begin. As the middle section becomes more intense, Mahler writes "Tod! Verkl!," the latter presumably an abbreviation for "*Verklärung*" (transfiguration). At the climax he writes "*Erbarmen!!*" (Mercy!!) at the top of the page and, at the bottom, "*O Gott! O Gott! warum hast du mich verlassen?*" (O God! O God! Why hast thou forsaken me?). Six measures later, when the same music returns at an even greater level of intensity, he writes "*Dein Wille geschehe!*" (Thy will be done!).

Up to this point, each movement has been very much shorter than the one before: *Purgatorio* is less than one-quarter the length of the Adagio. The fourth movement is counterpoise to the second, and with it, the dimensions begin to expand again. Everything on the folder is violently crossed out except the Roman numeral IV and these notations:

*Wahnsinn, fass mich an, Verfluchten!
vernichte mich
das ich vergesse, dass ich bin!
das ich aufhöre zu sein
dass ich ver*

The Devil dances it with me
Madness, seize me, who am accursed!
destroy me
that I may forget that I exist!
that I may cease to be
that I for

Jack Diether rightly calls this movement "demonic." Mahler quotes the "mercy" motif from *Purgatorio*, alluding as well to *Das Lied von der Erde*—the reference is to the "morschen Tand" ("rotten trumpery") passage in the first song—and the Ninth Symphony. On the last pages the music disintegrates into the mutterings of percussion. A fortissimo thud of the muffled military drum is, so to speak, the last word, but Mahler fills the remaining space on the page with sprawling text:

*Du allein weißt was es bedeutet.
Ach! Ach! Ach!
Leb' wohl mein Saitenspiel!
Leb wohl
Leb wohl
Leb wohl*

with still more and larger exclamations of "Ach" on the left side.

You alone know what it means.
Farewell, my lyre!

"*Du allein*" means Alma. She tells this story in her *Memories and Letters*:

Marie Uchatius, a young art student, visited me one day in the Hotel Majestic. Hearing a confused noise, we leaned out of the window and saw a long procession in the wide street alongside Central Park. It was the funeral procession of a fireman about whose heroic death we had read in the newspaper. The chief mourners were almost directly below us when the procession halted, and the master of ceremonies stepped forward and spoke briefly. From our eleventh-floor window we could only guess at what he said. There was a brief pause, then a stroke on a muffled drum, then the dead silence. Then the procession moved on and it was all over. The scene brought tears to our eyes, and I looked anxiously at the window of Mahler's room. He too was leaning out, and tears were streaming down his face. That brief drum stroke impressed him so deeply that he used it in his Tenth Symphony.

Michael Kennedy writes in his Mahler biography that "this incident occurred on Sunday afternoon, 16th February 1908. The funeral was of Charles W. Kruger, Deputy Chief of the City of New York Fire Department, commanding the 2nd Division, who died . . . while fighting a fire at 217 Canal Street at 1 a.m. on 14th February. He had been in the fire service for thirty-six years."

The Finale begins without break, with the same sound of the muffled drum, and in the introduction a tentative unfolding of motifs is punctuated by five more repetitions of the drum stroke. The rising scale in the bass and the slower descending one both refer back to *Purgatorio*. Gradually the music gathers speed. At the same time, it begins the long voyage from D minor, where the fourth movement ended, back to F-sharp. A winding flute solo, a variant of the waltzing in the preceding scherzo, leads to a newly rapt and still music for strings. The drum of death breaks into this peace to introduce the quick music that forms the central portion of the Finale, again based on themes from

Purgatorio: what amazing riches this brief, almost incorporeal movement yields! Again, as in the first movement, a breaking point is reached in the trumpet's shrilling high A and the orchestra's brutally dissonant blanketing of that protest. Brass proclaim the opening viola melody, but from there Mahler moves into a music that is ardent, yet singularly at peace—in Michael Kennedy's words, "a great song of life and love—the most fervently intense ending to any Mahler symphony and a triumphant vindication of his spiritual courage."

This love song is to Alma. When the string music fades beyond our hearing, and woodwinds interject their gentle sighs, Mahler writes "*Für dich leben! für dich sterben!*" (To live for you! To die for you!). At the last, there is one terrible rearing up of violins—they vault through nearly two octaves and in a single beat swell from pianissimo to fortissimo—and there Mahler has written "*Almsch!*"

