

## Featured Essay

# Veni Creator Spiritus and Gustav Mahler's Eighth Symphony

by Salvatore Calomino

Salvatore Calomino is Associate Professor of German at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He holds the Ph.D. in Germanic Languages from Harvard University. Dr. Calomino's primary areas of research are Middle High German language and literature, medieval religious literature and hagiography, as well as the reception of medieval topics during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. He has also worked on the development of the "Faust" theme in both literary manifestations and its settings in music. On the latter topic Mr. Calomino delivered a lecture at the 2002 International Musicological Society Congress in Leuven. He is also co-translator of the libretto for the critical edition of the Mahler/Weber opera *Die drei Pintos* (2000).

"...der Faust ist nun allerdings ein rechtes Gemisch von alledem, und so wie man seine Schaffung ein ganzes, langes Leben umfaßt, so sind nun auch die Bausteine, aus denen er sich zusammensetzt, recht ungleich und oft bloßes *Material geblieben*. Das macht, daß man dem Werk auf verschiedene Art und von verschiedenen Seiten beikommen muß ... Die Wahrheit ist für *Jeden* – und für *Jeden* zu verschiedenen Epochen verschieden – anders geartet ..." – Gustav Mahler to his wife Alma, June 1909<sup>1</sup>

("Faust is indeed a true mixture of all of that, and just as its creation took up a whole long life, the elements from which it is composed are quite dissimilar and often remain as raw material. This means that one must approach the work in different ways and from different sides ... The truth of it is constituted differently for each of us – and differently for each of us in different epochs ...")

Gustav Mahler's encouraging words to his wife Alma concerning her interpretive readings of the conclusion to Goethe's *Faust II* are indicative of textual approaches taken by the composer in both parts of his Eighth Symphony. In his textual and musical treatments of inherited material for this work Mahler was able to establish a symbiotic relationship in which either part draws on common bonds of universal salvation and truth. We may ask whether this search for truth in *Faust II* as verbalized by Mahler can be equated with the freedom of art associated with the Viennese Secession and celebrated in its renowned 1903 exhibit. In his own interpretation of *Faust* – and specifically in his setting of the final scene – Mahler's individual approach becomes both apparent and distinctive. We should then examine first several elements of Mahler's textual rendition of Goethe. In this way it will be possible to underscore how Mahler indeed found truth in this work, how it was expressed in the Second Part of his Eighth Symphony, and how the hymn of the First Part functions as an integral preparation for this truth.

Gustav Mahler's textual choice in his setting of the final scene from Goethe's *Faust II* is generally faithful, yet marked also by excision and reordering. The changes undertaken by Mahler have been examined for their alterations to Goethe's symmetry, as well as the potential for dramatic economy and aural versus visual practicality in execution of motif<sup>2</sup>. In the final scene of Goethe's drama the introductory addresses

delivered by the Anchorite fathers establish and reiterate varying themes on Christian resolution and the concept of eternal return<sup>3</sup>. Mahler's largest ellipsis from Goethe's text occurs after the second full address and before the upward transposition of Faust's immortal essence, signaling that his soul has departed upon dying. After the *Chor* describes the mountainous gorge with forest and cliffs as a sacred place, the first address is delivered by the Pater Ecstaticus. He has attained a significant level in both holiness and knowledge and has further achieved the gift of floating or suspension above the ground. His words of self-abnegation are followed immediately by the lesser yet still significant attainments of the Pater Profundus who calls out his address from a lower station in the mountainous gorge. ["*Tiefe Region*"] The speeches of these first two holy men are taken over in their entirety by Mahler. Yet after the words of the Pater Ecstaticus while in levitation above and the Pater Profundus from a station below we expect an address by the Pater Seraphicus, in Goethe's words from a "*mittlere Region*." Mahler deletes this speech and the accompanying dialogue between the Pater Seraphicus and the *Chor seliger Knaben*, or Chorus of blessed boys. The omission of this combined textual exchange could be taken as a break in either the continuity or symmetry of Goethe's tightly organized sequence. Indeed the alteration thus effected in Mahler's adaptation has been examined for its interruption in the symmetry of holy figures set up by Goethe. Susanne Vill points to the progression of four as a means of structure in this final scene of *Faust*<sup>4</sup>. For Goethe, the roles of the three Patres listed precede Dr. Marianus, closest in his cell to a view of the Mater gloriosa. After the Virgin Mary becomes visible ["*schwebt einher*"] as something of an axis, the sequence of four is repeated by the addresses of the four blessed women: Magna peccatrix, Mulier Samaritana, Maria Aegyptiaca, and Una Poenitentium (Gretchen). Vill argues that the role of the Pater Seraphicus was dispensable for Mahler on both musical and textual grounds. Given his medial position before the higher placed Dr. Marianus, he would have allegedly been a distraction in the musical setting of the symphonic structure. Further, the symmetry of four is taken by Vill as more appropriate for an optical or staged representation; the efficacy in a musical composition would be far more difficult to maintain<sup>5</sup>. Several questions here arise. Might we not see both structural and substantive points in Mahler's adaptation of Goethe's final scene? A further response to the topic of symmetry would concern the very issues of structure prevalent in Mahler's own textual and musical interpretation of the conclusion to *Faust*. As Hermann Danuser has more recently suggested, the deletion of the role of Pater Seraphicus leaves the final words of Pater Profundus as the conclusion to the grouping of Patres: "*Erleuchte mein bedürftig Herz*" ["Enlighten / Give light to my needy heart"]. The line recalls both textually and in its musical setting the verse "*Accende lumen sensibus*" ["Kindle light in our senses"] from the hymn of Pentecost, "*Veni Creator Spiritus*," used by Mahler as the text for Part One of the Eighth Symphony<sup>6</sup>. This line which now bears greater textual emphasis thus becomes a critical point of contact between the two parts of the symphony. Mahler has further reordered Goethe's assignment of roles immediately following these final words of the Pater Profundus. The final reaction of the blessed boys to the (missing) Pater Seraphicus is here included but displaced by one in a new order. Instead, the angels bearing Faust's soul announce directly after the programmatic words of Mahler's final Pater ["*Erleuchte mein bedürftig Herz*"] that Faust is indeed "*gerettet*" or "saved."<sup>7</sup> Yet a further link is then established between salvation, enlightening, and the *Creator Spiritus* of Part One. We shall return to the revised position of the blessed boys and their newly placed reaction in Mahler's version. Given this process of revision and reordering we can argue that Mahler has made changes

<sup>1</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Briefe*. Ed. Mathias Hansen. (Leipzig: Philipp Reclam, 1985), 399-400. The translation that follows the quotation is my own.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, Vol. 3. Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion*. (Oxford/New York: Oxford UP, 1999), pp. 895-905; Susanne Vill, *Vermittlungsformen verbalisierter und musikalischer Inhalte in der Musik Gustav Mahlers*. (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1979), pp. 142-54; Hermann Danuser, "*Der Goethe-Interpret Mahler: Zur Achten Symphonie als Weltanschauungsmusik*," *Musik & Wetenschap/Dutch Journal for Musicology*, 5 (1995/96): 266-85; Rudolf Stephan, "*Zu Mahlers Komposition der Schlußszene von Goethes Faust*," *Schütz-Jahrbuch*, 4/5 (1982/83): 197-202.

<sup>3</sup> For commentary on the concept of "Erlösung" and the salvation of Faust in the final scene, see Goethe, *Faust*, ed. Erich Trunz. (München: C.H. Beck, 1972), pp. 626-38, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Kommentare*, ed. Albrecht Schöne. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1999), pp. 778-818.

<sup>4</sup> Vill, *Vermittlungsformen*, pp. 142-54, esp. 152 ff.

<sup>5</sup> Vill, *Vermittlungsformen*, p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> Danuser, "*Der Goethe-Interpret*," 278-80.

<sup>7</sup> Danuser also points to this sequence in his interpretation, "*Der Goethe-Interpret*," 280.

which speak to his own understanding or interpretation of Goethe's Faust.

In the spirit of his words to Alma, that truth perceived by Mahler in Faust and rendered in Part Two of the Symphony indicates his principles of adapting an inherited or established text. By the same token we should expect an independent treatment of the hymn in Part One of the Symphony. It will be shown that a similar process of deletion or expansion, as well as sequential reordering, defines Mahler's reception of the "Veni Creator Spiritus." Because of the accepted musical correspondences and motivic echoes from Part One that figure structurally in Part Two of the Symphony,<sup>8</sup> we shall examine the potential goals and principles of textual reworking attendant on Mahler's interpretation of the Latin hymn.

From a structural and thematic standpoint Part One of Mahler's Eighth Symphony serves as a preparation for Part Two and exhibits a number of tendencies which are expanded and varied by the composer in the latter section. Specific letters documenting Mahler's intensive work on the hymn for Pentecost, "Veni Creator Spiritus," during June and July 1906 have traditionally been used as a means of dating the start of his actual composition of the Eighth Symphony.<sup>9</sup> Some dispute has also surrounded the specific version of the Medieval Latin hymn which Mahler might have at first used as the basis for his work.<sup>10</sup> Despite such controversies in relation to the original text to which the composer had access, it is not the intention of the present study to add further speculation to an intriguing issue. Rather, it would be more fruitful to examine Mahler's principles of adaptation in the version of the hymn that he finally chose to set for Part One of the Symphony.

The overriding structure of the hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" is associated with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.<sup>11</sup> Already in its earliest attested medieval form this structural element guided the composition of the sequence. As discussed extensively by Heinrich Lausberg in his study on the hymn, the original concept of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is derived from Isaiah 11 as related to the branch of Jesse at the start of the same chapter.<sup>12</sup> The gifts are traditionally listed, from Isaiah 11, 2-3, in the following order: 1. *sapientia* (wisdom), 2. *intellectus* (understanding), 3. *consilium* (counsel), 4. *fortitudo* (fortitude), 5. *scientia* (knowledge), 6. *pietas* (piety), 7. *timor Domini* (fear of the Lord). According to liturgical tradition since Augustine, the order of these gifts for exegetical purposes was given in reverse order. Aside from the rhetorical possibilities of interpretation in such a sequential order, this reversal was deemed an appropriate pedagogical tool for the imperfect human essence.<sup>13</sup> In this order, *timor Domini* (fear of the Lord) stands in first position, in keeping with human weakness, and *sapientia* (wisdom) occupies the concluding field. In the hymn "Veni Creator Spiritus" a similar rhetorical and theological maneuver has been documented.<sup>14</sup> The significance of each of the strophes in the hymn can be matched to one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the

exegetical reversed order, beginning with "fear of the Lord." Although this order of strophes counts as the Urform of the hymn in its theological intent, we must also reckon with later variants or accretions to the original. It has been assumed that the original hymn dates to the Carolingian period, the earliest extant manuscripts surviving from the tenth century. Together with the Marian hymn "Ave maris stella" ["Hail, Star of the Sea"] our hymn for Pentecost figures among the oldest sequences still in use from the medieval Roman liturgy.<sup>15</sup> The approximate assumptions on dating have not yielded a unanimous opinion on the author of "Veni Creator Spiritus." The question of authorship could also bear on interpretive readings of the hymn as linked to theological intent in the purpose of its genesis. Lausberg has provided strong evidence for reconsidering Hrabanus Maurus as the original poet. A student of the great theologian Alcuin, who functioned as adviser and teacher of Charlemagne, Hrabanus Maurus himself served as Abbot in Fulda and later as Archbishop of Mainz. By examining parallels to Hrabanus's participation in a liturgical counsel at Aachen in 809, Lausberg defines the purpose of the text as a "Kampfhymnus," or battle hymn, calling on the Holy Spirit to strengthen belief in the identity of Father and Son. Allegedly the hymn was used as a sequence for Pentecost only some time after the death of Hrabanus Maurus and came into such usage commonly in subsequent centuries.<sup>16</sup> This theory of authorship has been met with both agreement and skepticism, so that consensus on the original purpose of the hymn is outstanding. The hymnal of the Roman Church still ascribes the hymn to Hrabanus Maurus. Scholars who have been concerned with Mahler's textual base in his Eighth Symphony are split on theories of origin and purpose for the hymn. Whereas Strohm and De la Grange hold open the likelihood for Hrabanus Maurus, Mitchell prefers that the hymn be "ascribed Anon."<sup>17</sup>

The final text used in Mahler's adaptation of the hymn has undergone interpretive modifications which will be discussed below. Some critics have emphasized the penultimate strophe in Mahler's text [rehearsal number 71 ff.]<sup>18</sup>, beginning with the words "Da gaudiorum praemia / Da gratiorum munera," ("Give the reward of your joy / Give the gift of your grace").<sup>19</sup> Since this strophe does not appear in the earliest liturgical versions of the hymn, it is considered to represent an alternate and later tradition.<sup>20</sup> Both Vill and Strohm have speculated on Mahler's use of this strophe to fill out his conception of agreement between text and music. Strohm has also pointed to a Munich manuscript containing the hymn with this specific accretion.<sup>21</sup> Yet the tradition of interpolating an additional four-line strophe into the "Veni Creator Spiritus" was a common practice already in the medieval period. Evidence from twelfth-century manuscripts suggests that this strophe was at times inserted into the hymn in penultimate sequence.<sup>22</sup> This practice would correspond to its placement in the Munich manuscript from which Mahler allegedly had textual access or text provided to him. Since this tendency seems to have been prevalent in breviaries from succeeding

<sup>8</sup> See especially Ortrun Landmann, "Vielfalt und Einheit in der Achten Sinfonie Gustav Mahlers. Beobachtungen zu den Themen und zur Formgestalt des Werkes," *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft*, 17 (1975): 29-43, and Theodore Bloomfield, "The Contrasts of Mahler's Eighth Symphony," in A "Mass" for the Masses: Proceedings of the Mahler VIII Symposium, Amsterdam 1988, ed. Eveline Nickels & Robert Becqué. (Rijswijk, Netherlands: Universitair, 1992): pp. 167-79.

<sup>9</sup> Mahler, *Briefe*, pp. 342-43.

<sup>10</sup> On possibilities for Mahler's access to various versions of "Veni Creator Spiritus" see Vill, *Vermittlungsformen*, pp. 135-41; Stefan Strohm, "Die Idee der absoluten Musik als ihr (ausgesprochenes) Programm. Zum unterlegten Text der Mahlerschen Achten," *Schütz-Jahrbuch*, 4/5 (1982/83): 73-91, esp. 82-91; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, III*, pp. 893-95

<sup>11</sup> de La Grange comments as well on Mahler's retention of this symbolic number in his setting of the hymn, de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, III*, p. 893.

<sup>12</sup> Heinrich Lausberg, "Der Hymnus 'Veni Creator Spiritus,'" *Jahrbuch der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen für das Jahr 1969* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1969): 26-58, esp. 32-37.

<sup>13</sup> Lausberg, "Der Hymnus," 26-34, cites further specific tracts from Augustine through the Carolingian period to underscore this exegetical practice.

<sup>14</sup> Lausberg, "Der Hymnus," 32-34.

<sup>15</sup> *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi*, vol. 50, pp. 193-94; F.J.E. Raby, *A History of Christian-Latin Poetry from the Beginnings to the Close of the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1953), pp. 179-89; Josef Szövérfy, *Die Annalen der lateinischen Hymnedichtung: Ein Handbuch. I. Die lateinischen Hymnen bis zum Ende des 11. Jahrhunderts*. (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1964); *A Dictionary of Hymnology*, vol. 2, ed. John Julian, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1907; rpt. Minneola, NY: Dover, 1957, pp. 1206-11.

<sup>16</sup> Lausberg, "Der Hymnus," 51-55.

<sup>17</sup> Strohm, "Idee der absoluten Musik," 82-84; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, III*, pp. 892-93; Donald Mitchell, *Gustav Mahler, Volume III: Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 513.

<sup>18</sup> All references to the score of Mahler's Eighth Symphony are to the following edition: Gustav Mahler, *Sämtliche Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Band VIII: Symphonie Nr. 8 (Es-Dur)*, ed., Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft, Wien. (Wien: Universal, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> Vill, *Vermittlungsformen*, pp. 136-41; Strohm, "Die Idee der absoluten Musik," 84-91; de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler, III*, pp. 894-95.

<sup>20</sup> *Dictionary*, pp. 1207-09.

<sup>21</sup> Strohm, "Die Idee der absoluten Musik," 90-91.

<sup>22</sup> *Dictionary*, p. 1207.

centuries, it would be difficult to isolate such textual expansion as a means of specific identification among competing versions of the hymn. Of greater significance is Mahler's treatment of the inherited text – or texts – and the effect of his modifications on theological and philosophical interpretation in the context of the Eighth Symphony as a whole.

Mahler's approach to setting "*Veni Creator Spiritus*" is marked by both textual emendation and specific alternations in musical emphasis. Both techniques serve to underscore his interpretation of the hymn as a hallmark of inspiration as well as salvation. In addition to significant repetitions in the second half of the text Mahler has rearranged several strophes in the first half. Since we have seen the series of gifts of the Holy Spirit associated with the progression of strophes in early versions of the hymn, any change in the order of strophes indicates a shift in the enumeration of these gifts. From a purely textual standpoint Mahler has placed in third position the strophe that had originally occupied fourth position in the medieval hymn. In Mahler's version the third strophe reads:

<p>Infirma nostri corporis Virtute firmans perpeti Accende lumen sensibus Infunde amorem cordibus</p>	<p>Strengthen our weak flesh With Your perpetual strength Kindle light in our senses Pour love into our hearts.</p>
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Here he has also inverted the pairing of lines, so that "*Infirma nostri corporis*" now begins the strophe; in earlier liturgical tradition the strophe began with his line three, "*Accende lumen sensibus*." The effect of the overall shift in textual progression is striking. Earlier versions of the hymn interwove the types of spiritual gifts and placed the prayer for strength, or fortitude, after the strophe associated with *scientia*, or knowledge emanating from the spirit. Mahler has effectively interrupted the earlier theological flow by separating the order of gifts. In the order now followed in Mahler's setting the gifts emphasized in the first three consecutive strophes are fear of the Lord, piety, and fortitude. The following strophes then group together knowledge, counsel, understanding, and wisdom. In this rearrangement we may indeed see an emphasis on mortality in the first part culminating in a prayer for strength. This polarity could then further be defined as the corporeal vs. intellectual, given the new ordering of attributes in the second part where four gifts of the ratio are linked together.<sup>23</sup> The textual union of the first three strophes is again emphasized in the latter part of the hymn. From rehearsal number 54 through number 71 significant elements of the Strophes Three, One, and Two – in that order – are repeated before the last two strophes from the second part are used by Mahler to conclude his setting of the hymn. [rehearsal numbers 71-92]. Thus within the development of the second group of gifts we encounter a repetition of the mortality associated with the first group or ordering.

If we ask after the point of musical emphasis the third strophe cited above stands out on several grounds. The concept of human frailty bound up in the prayer with a plea for enlightenment from the Holy Spirit receives even greater emphasis in Mahler's musical setting. The first two strophes preceding "*Infirma nostri corporis*" are linked in their composition. At rehearsal number 12 the final words of Strophe One ("*creasti pectora*") are sung simultaneously with the first words of Strophe Two ("*Qui Paraclitus*"). By the same token, the verses following Strophe Three are set together musically and thus separated from the preceding. At rehearsal number 48 the words "*Hostem*," "*Ductore*," and "*Vitemus*" from Strophe Four are sung together with the word "*munere*" from the following group of verses. We may conclude from this type of musical setting that Strophe Three – at this point in the hymn – stands in isolation from its surrounding textual associations. This isolation is further emphasized by a series of measures at rehearsal numbers 17-18 and again at number 41. The first of these contains an instrumental interlude; in the second the instruments without accompanying voices finish the phrase. These brief instrumental parts show the strophe "*Infirma nostri corporis*" separated from the link that exists between Strophes One-Two and Four-Five. On either side of the divide from Strophe Three we encounter humanity

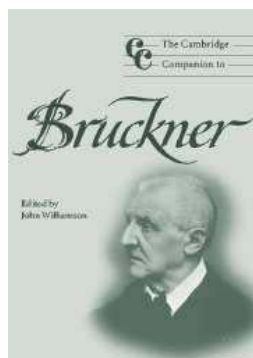
yearning toward the spirit ("*spiritalis unctio*," close of Strophe Two) and hoping to resist the enemy ("*Hostem repellas*," start of Strophe Four).

In addition to those qualities of Mahler's musical setting which identify or set apart his Strophe Three, the use of choral and solo voices within this part emphasizes aspects of unity. It was noted above that the verse "*Accende lumen sensibus*" functions as something of a bridge between Parts One and Two of the Eighth Symphony. The first full declamation of this line starting on the beat before rehearsal number 38 is especially distinctive for its implications of structural unity. These measures show a notable use of homophonic texture with soloists and choral voices in unison. As a further aspect of Mahler's setting we note here the initial entrance of the *Knabenchor*, their next utterance occurring at rehearsal number 49 on the words "*Tu septiformis munere*" ("You of sevenfold gifts"). The *Knabenchor* is thus joined in unison at the increased intensity of the great "*Aufschwung*" (Mahler's expression marking) of enlightenment with "*Accende lumen sensibus*." We later recall the dramatic significance of their participation here in Part One with the return of this theme in Part Two of the Symphony. After the concluding words of the Pater Profundus begging for enlightenment, we have noted Mahler's shift of the order of parts for the angels and the blessed boys. Faust's salvation is announced by the angels immediately after the words of the Pater, recalling the "*Accende*" motif from Part I. The blessed boys respond in Mahler's setting only now and participate in a revised symmetrical pattern with the various groups of angels: blessed boys/younger angels / more perfected angels / younger angels/blessed boys. The latter function thus as an intermediary together with the groups of angels recalling the nature of the *Paraclete*, or heavenly advocate – the Creator Spiritus – from the hymn of Part I. A final note of symmetry can be seen in the number of holy men and women in Mahler's adaptation of this concluding scene from Goethe's *Faust, II*. By eliminating the figure of Pater Seraphicus, Mahler has revised the number from eight to seven as an echo of the gifts of the Holy Spirit associated with Part I of the Symphony. From this perspective, we may indeed speak of Mahler's revised interpretation of human salvation in *Faust* based on the enlightening intervention of the Spirit.

## New Book Announcement

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Contributors: John Williamson, Andrea Harrandt, Paul Hawkshaw, A. Crawford Howie, Derek B. Scott, Benjamin M. Korstvedt, Julian Horton, Margaret Notley, Kevin Swinden, Christa Brüstle

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<sup>23</sup> Strohm, "*Die Idee der absoluten Musik*," 84-86. Here Strohm also treats the reordering of the gifts as a sign of Mahler's understanding of the hymn. The present author does not agree with Strohm's oppositions suggested for death-creation and male-female.