

## *A Member Remembers...*

### **The Colorado MahlerFest A Brief History**

by Stan Ruttenberg

A dream of young conductor Robert Olson in 1987 was the genesis of MahlerFest. Olson had won a Fulbright scholarship in 1973 to study conducting in Vienna with Hans Swarowsky, who earlier had been the mentor for Claudio Abbado and Zubin Mehta. In Vienna it was easy to become saturated with the late-romantic music, with so many concerts and opera of high quality. Olson was already consumed with the symphonic brilliance of Mahler's First and Fourth Symphonies, but he observed an unusual occasion that made a life-long impression upon him. The President of Austria had died. He was venerated by the public and was given a simple but engaging funeral. Olson observed the funeral procession — three horse drawn-carriages (one containing the body of the President), on which was mounted a sound system, blaring forth the funeral march from Mahler's Fifth Symphony as it paraded slowly around the Ringstrasse of Vienna, and he was deeply moved by it. His year in Vienna involved learning many of the other Mahler symphonies, purchasing critical editions, along with visiting the Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft and many of the Mahler sites in Austria. In short, he was hooked.

On his return to the USA, Olson took a position at the College of Music at the University of Colorado (CU) in Boulder. Olson became the Music Director and Conductor of the excellent opera program and associate conductor of the orchestras. I witnessed many of Olson's performances at the time, including a moving account of Leonard Bernstein's Mass, all very good considering the limited resources he had at his disposal, and never dreaming that one day I would become his close associate in MahlerFest, a concept that I could not imagine at that time.

Not much Mahler was being played in Boulder, or even in Colorado, for that matter. Giora Bernstein, conductor of the excellent Colorado Music Festival, started scheduling a Mahler work most every summer season, Jorge Mester at Aspen featured Mahler on occasion, and the Denver Symphony under Gaetano deLogu performed one or two Mahler symphonies. It occurred to Olson that there was an open niche to be filled.

Here is how this dream was realized, as Olson tells the story. Olson's wife, Victoria, is a violist, and she played in the summer Breckenridge Music Festival. Olson often relaxed with a book, or studying scores while Vicki was at rehearsals, and he often chose as a favored spot the shore of Lake Dillon, a reservoir framed by the magnificent 14,000-foot peaks of the Colorado Rockies. What a beautiful spot, Olson mused, not unlike Mahler's summertime composing environs.

On this particular day he was reading a Mahler biography, and it (and the beauty of the moment) was the catalyst for creating a performing outlet for the countless musicians he knew who shared his passion for the music of Mahler. Why not a Colorado MahlerFest? One symphony every year, performed by the best available and interested musicians in the area at the highest level they could achieve in a short period of time.

There would be many reasons *not* to do a MahlerFest; after all, there are many "Mozart" or "Bach" festivals, where small numbers of orchestral players are needed. But a Mahler Festival? If it were to survive into the second year (to perform the "Resurrection" Symphony), it would need almost 300 performers! And so the concept began to crystallize. The musicians would have to be volunteers because it would be impossible to find the funds to pay 100+ musicians every year. Olson chose the first week in January because it was still between semesters at the University, and it was a "dead" time in the arts calendar in the 1980s. As to recruiting an orchestra, he felt confident he could find enough musicians to do the First Symphony, especially since he astutely just programmed the same piece with the community orchestra he conducted, the Longmont Symphony just a

month earlier; thus, if he could not recruit enough good players from the "Front Range," he would ask his orchestra simply to "perform it (Mahler's First) again". In addition, as a conductor at the University, he had an additional pool of talented players he felt he could "talk into" playing, if necessary.

Olson was adamant from the beginning that the festival be multi-faceted in concept; i.e., chamber as well as orchestra concerts, lectures by experts on Mahler as well as the general art scene of the turn of the twentieth century in Vienna, Mahler-related films and videos, and, as it turned out, also drama and ballet.

Imagine the surprise of me and my wife when we opened the local newspaper one day in November and read: MahlerFest I, January 16-17, 1988, at the CU music building. "Oh Yeah", my wife and I said, "a Mahler festival in Boulder". We have to see it to believe it. We could not wait!

Well, the magical weekend came, and we witnessed an exciting set of concerts. The program for January 16 included a lecture by Prof. Steven Bruns, of the CU faculty, on "Mahler, the Early Works." This was followed by performances of the Piano Quartet, and the *Lieder und Gesänge au der Jugendzeit*. The orchestra concert the next day included the First Symphony and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. The performances were spirited but certainly not without problems, the audience was wildly enthusiastic, and the press was kind. At the end of the orchestra concert, my wife and I looked at each other and said something like, "WOW!"

What I could not have known was what Olson was going through to make the festival happen. He did everything without any assistance, from recruiting the orchestra, soloists, and lecturers, writing press releases, printing the program, even buying the food and snacks for the orchestra that is still a tradition for the final dress rehearsal. One of his favorite anecdotes comes from the first orchestral performance. As he was walking on stage to begin the concert, Olson realized that he (being also the lighting and stage manager) had forgotten to dim the house lights and brighten the stage lights. So, he turned around, ran around the building to the lighting panel, changed the lights, ran back to the stage, and proceeded, completely out of breath, to begin the concert, all the time promising to himself "THIS will NEVER happen again." The total budget for the first year was, according to memory, \$431.00! The concert, lectures, and film showing were all free to the public.

MahlerFest II in 1989 posed formidable problems for logistics, and Olson was skeptical at best. It was one thing to find enough musicians to do the First Symphony, and it is quite something else to find the 110-115 musicians for the Second Symphony, along with a large chorus and two soloists. Much to his surprise, Olson had more interested musicians than he could use, for at that time in concert history, the Second was not performed very often and many wanted the opportunity. The same was true for the vocal forces: "I would walk over glass from Chicago to sing Mahler," stated one soloist. He also hired some student help to assist with the many details that accompany such an undertaking. This time, it was necessary to charge admission to offset the "increased" budget (approximately \$2500!)

The problems were solved and MahlerFest II took shape. First were again lectures, and then the chamber concert, featuring more songs from the *Lieder und Gesänge* and a few from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, the *Rückert Lieder* and the Bach Suite from Bach that Mahler arranged from BWV 1067 and BWV 1068. The single performance of the "Resurrection" Symphony garnered a tremendous response from the public and press alike, and the MahlerFest was launched, proving that it could handle the gigantic Mahler works as well as the smaller chamber works. To the delight of all of us Mahler fanatics, MahlerFest proceeded to grow and gain recognition in ways that no one imagined.

MahlerFest 1990 featured the Third Symphony. By now you realize that Olson planned to do the Mahler symphonies in order, one each year, as the general scheme of MahlerFest. By this time, Olson had

also found a way to produce a handsome full-format program book, at the beginning of which was the MahlerFest motto: Dedicated to the performance and study of the entire Mahler repertoire. Ken Russell's film was shown again, and Visconti's beautiful film *Death in Venice* was also shown. There were several lecturers, and for the first time, a non-local expert was invited. The chamber program included four piano pieces and three songs of Alban Berg; *Ablösung im Sommer*, Mahler's song which provided the basic theme for the fourth movement of the Third Symphony; Mahler's song *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*, arranged for small chorus; and Mahler's song cycle "Kindertotenlieder." The 500-seat concert hall was packed full, with the overflow audience listening in the lobby.

Soon afterward Olson accepted the position of Head of Orchestras and Opera at the University of Missouri, Kansas City. He certainly didn't want to abandon MahlerFest in Boulder; to provide an organizational mechanism to do the planning and fund-raising, Olson incorporated MahlerFest as a 501(c)(3) corporation and consequently had to organize a Board of Directors. When my wife and I were invited to join the Board, little did I know then how this would change my life.

There is not enough space here to continue to review MahlerFest's yearly event in detail, so I will limit myself to providing significant highlights. MahlerFest IV provided the first departure in Olson's long-range plan. Olson realized that the timing for that event was right at the time his wife would be expecting their second child, so he asked his friend, David Lockington, to step in at the last moment. Lockington was conducting the Mahler Fourth with the Cheyenne Wyoming orchestra, so would be prepared, but he would also have to learn Mahler's first extant major work, *Das Klagende Lied* (the revised two-part version), which was a première performance for Boulder, probably also for Colorado and, possibly, for the Rocky Mountain region.

MahlerFest V was the first year we did two performances of the symphony, a practice that we have since followed. That season we also included a chamber drama written by MahlerFest Board members dealing with Mahler's relationships with Bruno Walter, Selma Kurz and Sigmund Freud. MahlerFest VI featured the performances of the "two versions" of the Sixth Symphony: the first as Mahler composed it with the inner movements in the Scherzo-Andante order, with 3 hammer blows, and the second performance was in the way Mahler conducted it in public performances, Andante-Scherzo, with two hammer blows. Gilbert Kaplan, who conducted the Second Symphony in Denver the year before, made that interesting suggestion when he joined some of us for lunch when he was in Denver for that thrilling performance.

MahlerFest VII featured an evening of ballet to Mahler's music, specially choreographed for us by a ballet expert and performed by his small ballet company. At this time we also knew that we had outgrown the small auditorium in CU's music building. This room had a good stage, seated about 550 people, but had a low ceiling. It was excellent for chamber music, recitals, etc., but was far too confined for the large Mahler orchestra – when Mahler wrote *fff* or even *ff* he really meant it, and our MahlerFest orchestra had become such a well-integrated, professional ensemble that when it played at Mahler's intended dynamics, the sound did not bloom, it could get harsh. MahlerFest VII was reviewed enthusiastically by the president of the New York Mahlerites (now the Gustav Mahler Society of New York) Gerald Fox, his first time to attend a MahlerFest. His article in the *American Record Guide* literally put us on the national map. Fox has attended every MahlerFest since, contributing to panel discussions, several symposia, and also giving many pre-concert lectures. Dr. James Zychowicz, active with the Chicago Mahlerites, was our guest lecturer.

The symphony to be featured for MahlerFest VIII, 1995, was, naturally, the massive Eighth Symphony, which could not possibly be performed in the usual hall. CU also has a large 2,000 seat performing space, Macky Auditorium; it has excellent acoustics; a good stage, deep but somewhat narrow, which can be set up for choruses; it also has high side-boxes, which also can be used for choruses or "off-stage" musicians; and a fine full-throated pipe organ. The downside of using this auditorium was the additional expense, the requirement to use assigned seating rather than open seating, the need to use the university's parking service, and the lack in the building of a smaller

room in which to have the pre-concert lectures. But, there was no other option — if MahlerFest were to stage the Eighth Symphony, we had to go for the large auditorium. Our anticipated budget of a few thousand dollars expanded to many tens of thousands of dollars, so we had to seek new sources of funds, and ways to provide lodging for five of the eight soloists were coming from out of town. Musical challenges mostly involved the choruses. To our great delight, good timing came to the rescue — the Aspen Music Festival had scheduled the Eighth the summer before. Thus, the children' chorus would have to learn the music — the Denver Children's Chorale under Duain Wolfe (now chorus director for the Chicago Symphony as well as the Colorado Symphony) and one adult chorus, the Colorado Symphony Chorus, would also know the music and many members agreed to participate with us. The Colorado Mormon Chorus agreed to work ahead of time to learn the music and merge with the other choruses for some final rehearsals under the direction of Mary Louise Burke. Another aspect of MahlerFest VIII of interest to the Chicago Mahlerites was that a musician named Richard Oldberg called up Olson and said something like, "I heard that there is something called MahlerFest and that you are going to do the Mahler Eighth. If so, I'd like to play horn." Olson asked for Dick's qualifications and, upon learning that Oldberg played third horn in the Chicago Symphony for 33 years, Olson replied, "You're on." Dick has been first horn since — he is also first horn with the Boulder Philharmonic, conducts their ballet performances, and has played with the Colorado Symphony. For MahlerFest VIII, two well-qualified sound engineers came from the east at their own expense to do digital recordings — Jerry Bruck from New York, and Steve Sarper from Stamford, Connecticut. Their product is well known as it was mastered and pressed commercially and 2,000 copies were distributed widely. (It is now out of stock but CD-R sets are still available.) Finally, this was the one MahlerFest since we moved to Macky Auditorium that had only one performance, as the schedule of the rehearsals required that the dress rehearsal be held on Saturday night. The Sunday afternoon performance was sold out on a sunny January day with spring-like temperature of 70 degrees Fahrenheit! A few ticket holders decided to play golf or tennis instead of attending, so they missed the musical highlight of 1995 in Boulder.

The experience of performing Mahler in Macky Auditorium was so encouraging, that we decided that all future MahlerFests would be done in that large space, notwithstanding the expense and the problem of selling tickets for assigned seating. Until then we had sold tickets mainly at the door of the smaller auditorium. For MahlerFest VIII we sold the tickets by phone — our home phone, with voice mail. Calls came in so furiously for the Eighth that several colleagues volunteered to help my wife. At one point, when she took a call and then hung up, the cheerful voice-mail voice informed her that there were 89 calls waiting. For MahlerFest IX she wrote a computer program that kept track of all seats sold and we installed a second phone line. MahlerFest IX, featuring, of course, the Ninth, was dedicated to my long-time friend and musical mentor William Malloch, who has just succumbed to prostate cancer. Bill's Chicago connection is that he had persuaded Gordon Peters, the conductor of the Chicago Civic Orchestra, to première Clinton Carpenter's orchestration of the Mahler Tenth. That knowledge led us to ponder what we would do for MahlerFest X, 1997. Jerry Bruck persuaded Bob Olson that he ought to consider performing the orchestration of the Tenth done by the English brass player Joe Wheeler and offered to get the score. Bruck had met Wheeler once and also knew that Jack Diether had consulted with Wheeler on the work. In fact, Jack's widow, Doris, had Jack's collections and found Wheeler's scores of his two completed versions in Wheeler's own hand, and generously let us photocopy them. To make a very long story short, we enlisted the aid of Prof. Edward "Ted" R. Reilly, the acknowledged expert on Mahler manuscripts, the Dutch Mahler Tenth enthusiast, Frans Bouwman, and through correspondence Remo Mazzetti, who had completed two orchestrations of this symphony, to help us decipher Wheeler's final score, written on poor paper so that the ink ran and smeared. Corrections and editing decisions were made as late as the final rehearsal, but the performance came off well. This concert was recorded by Bruck, pressed commercially, and 1,000 copies were made available with comprehensive booklets. Bouwman, who had participated in organizing the 1986 Utrecht Symposium on the Tenth, Bruck and Mazzetti kindly helped us with many details of the history of

the symphony. MahlerFest IX also included a "mini" symposium on the Tenth.

In 1998, we were coming to the end of performing all the Mahler symphonies, but not all of the song cycles or collections for orchestra. Our volunteer orchestra was enthusiastic to continue MahlerFest so we decided to do it again, and this time include the orchestral versions of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, *Kindertotenlieder*, *Rückertlieder*, and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Olson made the brave decision to end Cycle 1 of MahlerFest and begin Cycle 2 with a concert comprising *Das Lied von der Erde* and the First Symphony. This time, however, our Board persuaded Olson to do the 1893 five-movement Hamburg version of the First. We also organized a major symposium, with eighteen renowned Mahler experts, including Henry-Louis de La Grange; Dr. Susan Filler (one of the founding members of the Chicago Mahlerites); Gilbert Kaplan the "financier/amateur (in the best sense of the word)"; Jonathan Carr, author of a recent biography of Mahler; and many others. Three participants in MahlerFest XI have become "regular" contributors – Prof. Stephen Hefling, Case Western Reserve, Dr. Stuart Feder (whose book on Mahler is scheduled to be released in Fall 2004), and Prof. Marilyn McCoy. Dr. Donald Mitchell was our guest speaker at MahlerFest XIV and is scheduled to be with us again for MahlerFest XVIII. MahlerFest XVIII, alas, will not feature the Eighth as the required choruses could not be recruited for January 2005, but we shall keep trying to assemble the needed forces for a future date. The Ninth will be performed in January 2005, preceded by Brahms' *Tragic Overture*

That leaves a few years for the Eighth Symphony, *Das Lied von der Erde*, the original three-part version of *Das Klagende Lied*, a reprise of the First Symphony and, perhaps, *Todtenfeier* to round out performances of all of Mahler's extant orchestral works. What will happen after that is under discussion. Any decisions will be announced on our web page at [www.mahlerfest.org](http://www.mahlerfest.org). Stay tuned!

## Upcoming Events

The Chicago Mahlerites will organize two simultaneous events on the week of January 10-16, 2005 as follows:

### Colorado MahlerFest XVIII, Boulder

Four days of chamber music series, orchestra rehearsals, lectures and unmatched Mahlerian camaraderie, culminating in two performances of Mahler's Ninth Symphony. All these will take place in Boulder, Colorado from January 13-16, 2005. *Naturlaut* has published several reports on the Festival, and in this issue we learn about this unique event from its president, Mr. Stan Ruttenberg. The Chicago Mahlerites will organize a special trip to the MahlerFest. We will start planning for the details of this trip on our e-mail discussion forum as well as on our website very soon. Please mark your calendar.

### Evanston Symphony Orchestra

The Evanston Symphony Orchestra and its music director, Mr. Lawrence Eckerling, have cordially invited members of The Chicago Mahlerites to attend the orchestra dress rehearsal on Saturday, January 15, 2005 at Pick-Staiger Concert Hall of Northwestern University. The program of the concert (which will take place also at Pick-Staiger on January 16, 2005) includes:

Torke:	Bright Blue Music
Mahler:	<i>Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen</i>
	Randall Scarlatta, baritone
Dvorak:	Symphony No. 6

This is a great opportunity to witness how the conductor and the performers put together a performance, and to show support for several of our members who will be performing in the concert, including Mr. Eckerling himself. Admission to the rehearsal is free and the ticket to the concert is \$20. We encourage everyone to attend both events and support this very fine community orchestra. More details to follow. Please also visit the orchestra's website: [www.evanstonsymphony.org](http://www.evanstonsymphony.org)

## Letters to the Editor

Teng-Leong Chew's paper on the original Chinese source poem for "*Von der Jugend*" continues his excellent series of studies on the Chinese literary sources for *Das Lied von der Erde*. His websites on the topic are also enjoyable and well worth a visit.

With a Mahler cycle recently concluded in Shanghai, and new cycles about to begin in Hong Kong (under Edo de Waart) and Taiwan, this is a very timely subject. It is not however a new one in Chinese musical and poetic circles.

It seems that following a performance of *Das Lied von der Erde* in Beijing in May 1998, a Chinese Vice-Premier who was in attendance ordered immediate research into the original source poems for both "*Der Einsame im Herbst*" and "*Von der Jugend*", both of which had not been identified during the performance. This started a race between Chinese scholars to solve these "mysteries". A website (in Chinese) was soon set up to monitor progress and theories:

<http://www.guoxue.com/ddxr/dadizhige/dadi000.htm>

In a 1999 article in the journal "Music Lover" (*Yinyue Aihaozhe*), Qian Renkang relates the story of how he had exchanged correspondence with Donald Mitchell in 1983 concerning the source poem for "*Der Einsame*". Mitchell agreed that Qian's proposed poem (*Xiaogu Qiuyechang*: "Imitation of Old Poem, Long Autumn Night") was a possible source in his 1985 Vol. III (*Songs and Symphonies of Life and Death*); Teng-Leong mentions that Mitchell did not finally accept this theory but Prof. de La Grange had identified this poem correctly in 1984 (how did Henry-Louis de La Grange go about doing this?).

Qian then states that he "later" went to work on identifying the Chinese source poem for *Von der Jugend*. He came down on the side of the poem discussed in Teng-Leong's essay ("Banquet at the Tao Family Pavilion"). Unfortunately, Mr. Qian does not give a year for his discovery, so we can only surmise that this occurred sometime between 1983 and 1999. Whether or not he made his identification prior to Ms. Fusako Hamao in her 1995 article is unclear. It is of course entirely possible that these identifications occurred independently of each other.

A few other comments: 1) Hans Bethge's anthology is not limited to only Tang Dynasty poets and poetry, but includes selections from Chinese historic periods both before and after Tang. 2) Gautier's penchant for adding 'color' adjectives is mentioned; however it is worth noting that in the Chinese source poem for "*Von der Jugend*" discussed by Teng-Leong, the color green is already present.

Mike Bosworth  
Vientiane, Laos

## ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FEES DUE ON JANUARY 1, 2005

Due to the increasing number of members, we will begin collecting annual membership dues on January 1, starting from 2005, instead of following the date each member joined the society. New members who joined during this year should have received all four issues of *Naturlaut*. Please send your checks to the address shown on page 16.

For those who have sent me their membership dues for 2004-2005, we have renewed your membership for 2005. Thank you.

## The Chicago Mahlerites welcome the following new members:

Mary H. Wagner from Saginaw, Michigan  
Kenneth W. Dritz from Downers Grove, Illinois