

The Sixth Symphony, nicknamed "Tragic" by some, ends tragically as the least performed of all "completed" symphonies (The Tenth, of course, can never be fairly taken into this account). Antal Dorati conducted the first performance, and Christoph Eschenbach conducted it last in 1998. This wonderful performance was reviewed by a couple of members and can be found on the society website.

The Seventh received its well-regarded interpretations under Levine's and Abbado's batons in 1980-1985. Abbado's authoritative recording has been dear to the heart of many until it was recently replaced by the even finer rendition with the maestro conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

"The Symphony of A Thousand" was first performed on April 24, 1917 at the Auditorium Theater under Frederick Stock. It involved, including Stock himself, nine conductors to put the performance together. Choruses from around the area taking part in this historical event included the Apollo Music Club, the Chicago Mendelssohn Club, the Philharmonic Society, Swedish Choral Club, American Choral Society, Bell Telephone Male Chorus (did they have female chorus?), Chicago Singverein, and last but not least, 200 boys from the Oak Park and River Forest grade and high schools. One can only imagine how awestruck the Chicagoans must have been by the magnificent view of nearly one thousand musicians and singers before them. This feat of near-miracle was not repeated again until 1971, when Solti (of course), performed it at the Civic Opera House and then recorded it in the magnificent Sofiensaal, Vienna (recording session only). Between Solti and Levine, they have performed this symphony nine times. Eschenbach conducted the symphony in the most recent performance in 1996, at the Medinah Temple, a magnificent venue which (at the time of this publication) is being converted, sadly, into a mall.

*Das Lied von der Erde* was the first Late Period triptych performed in the Windy City. Frederick Stock was, once again, the first conductor to bring it here during the tumultuous year of 1939. This zen-like symphonic song cycle is also the only major work of Mahler ever performed by the revered Fritz Reiner, who began his tenure with the Chicago Symphony in 1953. Eschenbach conducted the most recent performance at Ravinia on July 1, 1994.

The heart-wrenching Ninth has very rapidly become one of the top Mahlerian repertoires since its Chicago premiere on April 6, 1950 by George Szell. Rafael Kubelik performed it two years later in 1952, and again in 1969. Solti conducted it, amazingly, in 21 concerts in the 1980s, even showcasing the orchestra with this symphony on their first tour to Australia (1988). The most recent performances of the Ninth were given by Pierre Boulez in a series of four concerts in 1995.

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra has performed only two out of the numerous performing versions of the Tenth Symphony. Although Clinton Carpenter, one of the two Americans who completed a performing version for the symphony, is a local musicologist, his version has never been performed in public by the Chicago Symphony. Jean Martinon conducted the first performance of the Tenth in 1966, using the Cooke version (He used Cooke's first version at the time). James Levine gave the Ravinia premiere in 1979 (also using the Cooke version, probably the second). Leonard Slatkin, after giving the world premiere of Remo Mazzetti's first version in St. Louis with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra on March 10, 1995, came almost immediately to Chicago and performed the same version with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on April 13-15.

Overall, no other director conducted more Mahler than Sir Georg Solti. Frederick Stock, Claudio Abbado, James Levine and Christoph Eschenbach follow closely. Levine and Eschenbach have conducted Mahler's symphonies mainly at Ravinia. Daniel Barenboim, the current fearless leader of the Chicago Symphony has conducted four Mahlerian symphonies, the First, the Fifth, the Seventh and *Das Lied von der Erde*. Barenboim has also performed some of Mahler's lieder, which are not included in this survey. Amid the shocking absence of any Mahlerian symphony programmed in the 2002-3 season, we reflect back, with fond memory, to Stock's incredible foresight and tenacity to bring the many Mahlerian symphonies to the Windy City, and Solti's stamina to champion Mahler's work during his tenure.

## Lob des Hohen Verstands (In Praise of High Intellect)

by Jan Hoepfer

Ah, the critics. You can't live with 'em, and you can't live without 'em. Well, maybe you could live without some of them. And given the benefit of hindsight, there's nothing more fun than having a good chuckle at the expense of the fourth estate.

Here in Chicago, Mahler's music did not have a very auspicious beginning. At the start of the twentieth century, the city boasted a thriving press of over half a dozen daily newspapers, most of them with music critics. Thus, numerous published reactions document the first performance of a Mahler symphony in Chicago—Symphony No. 5, performed on March 22, 1907, by the Theodore Thomas Orchestra, conducted by Frederick Stock. For the most part (there are notable exceptions), these various papers sport the standard reaction to new music, even today: technically impressive, but far from enjoyable.

The article below wins my prize for least classy headline. The violent protest engendered by this performance of Mahler's Fifth (both the silent protest of a moiety of the audience, and the subsequent braying of critics like Mr. Ular) perhaps helps explain why, as you'll see in the graph on the opposite page, this work was not performed again in Chicago for years after the fateful premiere. What is most interesting about this article is not the tizzy that the writer works himself into, although this is hilarious to today's reader. Instead, the interesting thing to me is the quote by Frederick Stock, who was by most accounts an advocate of new music and admirer of Mahler, and who later gave performances of many of Mahler's works. Perhaps this rather negative quote was taken out of context, or perhaps Stock later reexamined his opinions of Mahler. At any rate, the critic seems to take the cues (and many of the words) for his own conclusions directly from Stock's comment.

Also curious is Stock's Strauss quote, a remark (though quoted second-hand) that Strauss had echoed at other times ("Look, he's certainly not a great composer. He's just a very great conductor. . . ." Strauss to Fritz Busch, quoted in Henry-Louis de La Grange, Vol. 3, p. 557). Could the comparison of Mahler to Meyerbeer (dubiously quoted though it may be) be a hint of anti-Semitism, perhaps stemming from Wagner's derision of Meyerbeer in his infamous essay "Judaism in Music"?

At any rate, Strauss, Stock, and Ular would all be stunned to know that, nearly a century after this disparaged Chicago performance, Mahler's symphonies would frequently rival Beethoven's in number of performances per season. They would be speechless upon hearing that there is a group in Chicago dedicated to listening to, discussing, and researching Mahler and his music. Read this article, and get a good laugh out of it. When you're finished laughing, though, think about the questions raised above, and feel free to write us with your remarks and opinions.

**Examiner, March 23, 1907**

**Ugly Symphony Is Well Played**

**Thomas Orchestra Shows Director Mahler of Vienna Writes Bad Music - by Miller Ular**

Gustav Mahler is director of the Vienna opera. He is unequaled as an opera director, and almost unsurpassed as an orchestra conductor. He is a man of remarkable personality and of profound musical learning. So it is but natural that he should compose. His principal compositions are symphonies—six of them. The fifth, known as "The Giant Symphony," was performed yesterday by the Theodore Thomas orchestra under the baton of Frederick Stock.

It is a work an hour and fifteen minutes in length,<sup>1</sup> and before it was done, fully half the audience had fled. And with good reason. For Mr.

<sup>1</sup> If Ular were indeed precise about this duration, Stock's overall timing rivals that of Bernstein/Wiener Philharmoniker (75:46).

Mahler, to judge by this one symphony that has been heard in Chicago, writes absolutely the ugliest music ever written.

Why the symphony should have been termed "The Giant" is hard to say. Because of its ugliness, it might have been named "The Octopus"; because of its length, "The Dachshund"; and because it is without form, and void, it might well be termed "Chaos."

Mr. Mahler's compositions have nothing to do with the true, the beautiful and the good, which are supposed to be subject matter of poetry and music. Rather he deals with the false, the ugly, and the meretricious. His technical knowledge of the orchestra is equaled only by Richard Strauss, and his learning by Reger. But of originality, he has not the slightest trace. His themes are trivial, sometimes vulgar, always uninteresting and lacking utterly beauty of melodic curve.

This symphony—which really is less of a symphony than any of Tchaikovsky's—is in five movements. Each of these movements is split up into innumerable subdivisions, by changes of tempo and rhythm. The result is a lack of cohesion and unity, producing an effect of intolerable tedium. Of these movements, the first is a funeral march, solemn and impressive, but which strikes one as lacking in spontaneity. The so-called scherzo is part waltz, part a sort of mazurka, and contains a piece of crass plagiarism on the scherzo from Beethoven's fifth—I refer to the passage for strings, pizzicato. The adagio is the one oasis in the desert—a beautiful, slow movement for strings and harp; deep, thoughtful, melodious and expressive. Then it all ends with a rondo, based on the cheapest of themes, developed with a skill almost superhuman, but quite ineffective.

In short, it is a symphony which, it is devoutly hoped, will never again be heard in Chicago.<sup>2</sup>



Mr. Stock's own view of this work is interesting. Here it is, as it was expressed to the writer yesterday after the concert:

"It is a pity that Mahler, with all his learning and ingenuity, has not more originality, more ability to conceive themes, to rise to real inspiration. It is a pity he has a sense of beauty no more highly developed. Most of the symphony is very ugly, indeed, though it is all highly interesting to the technical student. But, after all, Richard Strauss summed it up correctly when he said, 'Mahler is to the symphony of today what Meyerbeer was to the opera seventy-five years ago.' I do not believe that this symphony is the kind of music that will live."

A verdict both cruel and true. The only redeeming feature about it was that the orchestra—increased to about 100 men—played with a virtuosity it has never surpassed, making nothing of the unspeakable difficulties of the symphony. Each man and each group fairly surpassed itself, and the result was a truly remarkable rendition.

<sup>2</sup> By my count, the Fifth Symphony received 26 subsequent performances (in Chicago and Ravinia) between the premiere till the end of 1999.

## Use your imagination!

During a recent pre-concert picnic at Ravinia, Satya Khuon asked: If you get to ask Mahler one question, what would it be? Somebody right away thought that I would probably phrase the longest question in human history, making use of every conjunction in the English language. I was, of course, appalled by such a suggestion.

I would have phrased the whole question in German...

Anyway, we think this is a great question for the readership of *Naturlaut*. Please send your responses to the editor and we will include them in the next issue.

- Teng-Leong Chew

## The Mahler Archives Updates

The following articles and links have been added to the Mahler Archives. The Mahler Archives ([www.mahlerarchives.net](http://www.mahlerarchives.net)) are Internet-based resources housing many important articles pertaining to Mahler. This is, as far as we know, the only available archiving means to keep track of these invaluable materials. It is accessible to the general public free of charge. We strongly urge our members to take full advantage of it. New articles will continuously be added to the archives. So do check it often.

### New PDF files

- Rotational Form, Teleological Genesis and Fantasy-Projection in the Slow Movement of Mahler's Sixth Symphony - by Warren Darcy
- The Performing Versions of Mahler's Tenth Symphony - by T.L. Chew
- Mahler's Tenth Symphony - by Michael Steinberg
- Conversation with Deryck Cooke about Mahler's Tenth Symphony - by Avik Gilboa
- Berthold Goldschmidt: Obituary - by Bernard Keefe
- Ugly Symphony is well played - 1907 review of M5 Chicago premiere - by Jan Hoeper
- Performances of Mahler Symphonies by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra: A Historical Reflection - by Jan Hoeper and T.L. Chew
- Mahler: *Das Lied von der Erde* - by Stephen Hefling

### New links

- *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and the German *Volkslied* in the 18th and 19th Century - by Amy Schmiesing
- Gustav Mahler: Song Symphonist - by Gabriel Engel
- The 20th Century's Debt to Mahler: Our Debt to Him in the 21st - by Donald Mitchell
- Hans Rott and Gustav Mahler - by Martin Brilla
- Charles Ives - by Scott Mortensen

## Quotable Quotes

"So you are the new coach. Do you play the piano well?" Mahler asked. "Excellently," I replied, meaning simply to tell the truth, because a false modesty seemed inappropriate in front of a great man. "Can you read well at sight?" Mahler asked. "Oh, yes, everything," I said again truthfully. "And you know the regular repertoire operas?" "I know them all quite well," I replied with great deal of assurance.

Mahler gave a loud laugh, tapped me on the shoulder pleasantly, and concluded the conversation with "Well, that sounds quite splendid."

Bruno Walter recalling his first meeting with Gustav Mahler at the Hamburg Opera House