

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, “Resurrection” (1888-1894)

GUSTAV MAHLER ■ 1860-1911

In August 1886, the distinguished conductor Arthur Nikisch, later music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, appointed the 26-year-old Gustav Mahler as his assistant at the Leipzig Opera. At Leipzig, Mahler met Carl von Weber, grandson of the composer, and the two worked on a new performing edition of the virtually forgotten Weber opera *Die drei Pintos* (“*The Three Pintos*,” two being impostors of the title character). Following the premiere of *Die Drei Pintos*, on January 20, 1888, Mahler attended a reception in a room filled with flowers. This seemingly beneficent image played on his mind, becoming transmogrified into nightmares and waking visions, almost hallucinations, of himself on a funeral bier surrounded by floral wreaths.

The First Symphony was completed in March 1888, and its successor was begun almost immediately. Mahler, spurred by the startling visions of his own death, conceived the new work as a tone poem entitled *Totenfeier* (“*Funeral Rite*”). The title was apparently taken from the translation by the composer’s close friend Siegfried Lipiner, titled *Totenfeier*, of Adam Mickiewicz’s Polish epic *Dziady*. Though he inscribed his manuscript, “Symphony in C minor/ First Movement,” Mahler had no idea at the time what sort of music would follow *Totenfeier*, and he considered allowing

the movement to stand as an independent work.

The next five years were ones of intense professional and personal activity for Mahler. He resigned from the Leipzig Opera in May 1888 and applied for posts in Karlsruhe, Budapest, Hamburg and Meiningen. To support his petition for this last position, he wrote to Hans von Bülow, director at Meiningen until 1885, to ask for his recommendation, but the letter was ignored. Richard Strauss, however, the successor to Bülow at Meiningen, took up Mahler’s cause on the evidence of his talent furnished by *Die Drei Pintos* and his growing reputation as a conductor of Mozart and Wagner. When Strauss showed Bülow the score for the Weber/Mahler opera, Bülow responded caustically, “Be it *Weberei* or *Mahlerei* [puns in German on ‘weaving’ and ‘painting’], it makes no difference to me. The whole thing is a pastiche, an infamous, out-of-date bagatelle. I am simply nauseated.” Mahler, needless to say, did not get the job at Meiningen, but he was awarded the position at Budapest, where his duties began in October 1888.

In 1891, Mahler switched jobs once again, this time leaving Budapest to join the prestigious Hamburg Opera as principal conductor. There he again encountered Bülow, who was director of the Hamburg Philharmonic concerts. Bülow had certainly not forgotten his earlier low estimate of Mahler the composer, but after a performance of *Siegfried* he allowed that “Hamburg has now acquired a simply first-rate opera conduc-

tor in Mr. Gustav Mahler.” Encouraged by Bülow’s admiration of his conducting, Mahler asked for his comments on the still-unperformed *Totenfeier*. Mahler described their encounter:

“When I played my *Totenfeier* for Bülow, he fell into a state of extreme nervous tension, clapped his hands over his ears and exclaimed, ‘Beside your music, *Tristan* sounds as simple as a Haydn symphony! If that is still music then I do not understand a single thing about music!’ We parted from each other in complete friendship, I, however, with the conviction that Bülow considers me an able conductor but absolutely hopeless as a composer.”

Mahler, who throughout his career considered his composition more important than his conducting, was deeply wounded by this behavior, but he controlled his anger out of respect for Bülow, who had extended him many kindnesses and become something of a mentor. Bülow did nothing to quell his doubts about the quality of his creative work, however, and Mahler, who had written nothing since *Totenfeier* three years before, was at a crisis in his career as a composer.

The year after Bülow’s withering criticisms, Mahler found inspiration to compose again in a collection of German folk poems by Ludwig Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano called *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (“*The Youth’s Magic Horn*”). He had known these texts since at least 1887, and in 1892 set four of them for voice and piano. The following summer, when he was free from the pressures of conducting, he took rustic lodgings in a village near Salzburg, and it was there that he resumed work on the Second Symphony, five years after the first movement had been completed. Without a

clear plan as to how they would fit into the Symphony’s overall structure, he used two of the *Wunderhorn* songs from the preceding year as the bases for the internal movements. On July 16th, he completed the orchestral score of the Scherzo. By the end of summer 1893, the first four movements of the Symphony were done, but Mahler was still unsure about the work’s ending — the finality implied by the opening movement’s “Funeral Rite” seemed to allow no logical progression to another point of climax. As a response to the questions posed by the first movement, he envisioned a grand choral close for the work, much in the manner of the triumphant ending of Beethoven’s last symphony. Still, no solution presented itself.

In December 1892, Bülow’s health gave out and he designated Mahler to be his successor as conductor of the Hamburg Philharmonic concerts. A year later Bülow went to Egypt for treatment, but died suddenly at Cairo on February 12, 1894. Mahler’s friend Josef Förster described the memorial service at Hamburg’s St. Michael Church: “Mahler and I were present at the moving farewell.... The strongest impression to remain was that of the singing of the children’s voices. The effect was created not just by their singing of Klopstock’s profound poem [*Auferstehen* — ‘*Resurrection*’] but by the innocence of the pure sounds issuing from the children’s throats. Later I could not find Mahler, so that afternoon I hurried to his apartment. I opened the door and saw him sitting at his writing desk. He turned to me and said: ‘Dear friend, I have it!’ I understood: Klopstock’s poem, which that morning we had heard from the mouths of children, was to be the basis for the finale of the Second Symphony.” On June 29, 1894,

three months later, Mahler completed his monumental “Resurrection” Symphony, six years after it was begun.

The composer wrote of the expressive progression of the Second Symphony: “1st movement. We stand by the coffin of a well-loved person. What now? What is this life — and this death? Do we have an existence beyond it? Do life and this death have a meaning? — And we must answer this question if we are to live on.

“2nd movement — *Andante* (in the style of a *Ländler*). You must have attended the funeral of a person dear to you and then, perhaps, the picture of a happy hour long past arises in your mind like a ray of sun undimmed — and you can almost forget what has happened.

“3rd movement — Scherzo, based on *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* [“*St. Anthony Preaches to the Fishes*”]. When you awaken from the nostalgic daydream [of the preceding movement] and you return to the confusion of real life, the senseless bustle of daily activity may strike you with horror. Then life can seem meaningless.

“4th movement — *Urlicht* (‘*Primal Light*, mezzo-soprano solo). The moving voice of naïve faith sounds in our ear: I am of God, and desire to return to God!

“5th movement. We again confront all the dreadful questions. The end of all living things has come. The Last Judgment is announced and the ultimate terror of this Day of Days has arrived. Our senses fail us and all consciousness fades away at the approach of the eternal Spirit. The ‘Great Summons’ resounds: the trumpets of the apocalypse call. Softly there sounds a choir of saints and heavenly creatures: ‘Rise again, yes, thou shalt rise again.’ An almighty love shines through us with blessed knowing and being.”

Urlicht ("Primal Light")

O Röschen rot!
Der Mensch liegt in grösster Not!
Der Mensch liegt in grösster Pein!
Je lieber möcht' ich im Himmel sein!

Oh red rose!
Man lies in deepest need,
Man lies in deepest pain.
Much would I rather be in heaven!

Da kam ich auf einen breiten Weg:
Da kam ein Engelein und wollt'
mich abweisen!
Ach nein! Ich liess mich
nicht abweisen!
Ich bin von Gott und will
wieder zu Gott!
Der liebe Gott wird mir
ein Lichtchen geben,
Wird leuchten mir in das ewig
selig Leben!

Then I came onto a broad path:
An angel came and wanted
to send me away.
Ah, no! I would not be sent away.
I am from God and will return to God!
Dear God will give me a light,
Will illumine me to eternal, blessed life!

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Chorus and Soprano

Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du,
mein Staub, nach kurzer Ruh:
Unsterblich Leben
wird der dich rief dir geben.

Rise again, yes you will rise again,
my dust, after a short rest:
Immortal life
will He who called you grant to you.

Wieder aufzublüh'n wirst du gesät!
Der Herr der Ernte geht
und sammelt Garben
uns ein, die starben!

To bloom again you are sown!
The Lord of the harvest goes
and gathers sheaves,
even us, who died!

Mezzo-Soprano

O glaube, mein Herz, o glaube,
es geht dir nichts verloren!
Dein ist, was du gesehnt,
dein was du geliebt,
was du gestritten!

O believe, my heart, o believe,
Nothing will be lost to you!
What you longed for is yours,
Yours, what you have loved,
what you have struggled for!

O glaube,
du warst nicht umsonst geboren!
Hast nicht umsonst gelebt,
gelitten!

O believe,
You were not born in vain!
You have not lived in vain,
Suffered in vain!

Chorus

Was entstanden ist,
das muss vergehen!

Was vergangen, aufersteh'n!

Hör auf zu beben!

Bereite dich zu leben!

What was created
must pass away!

What has passed away must rise!

Cease trembling!

Prepare yourself to live!

Soprano and Mezzo-Soprano

O Schmerz! Du Alldurchdringer,
dir bin ich entrungen!

O Tod! Du Allbezwinger,
nun bist du bezwungen!

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,
in heissem Liebesstreben,

werd' ich entschweben
zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug' gedrunge-

nen!

O suffering! You that pierce all things,
From you have I been wrested!

O death! You that overcome all things,
now you are overcome!

With wings that I have won for myself
in the fervent struggle of love,

I shall fly away

to the light which no eye has pierced.

Chorus

Sterben werd' ich, um zu leben!

I shall die in order to live!

Soloists and Chorus

Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du,
mein Herz, in einem Nu!

Was du geschlagen,

zu Gott wird es dich tragen!

Rise again, yes you will rise again,
my heart, in the twinkling of an eye!

What you have conquered

will carry you to God!

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

APRIL 8 AND 9, 2017
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Symphony No. 2 for Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, GUSTAV MAHLER
Chorus and Orchestra in C minor, "Resurrection"

Allegro maestoso. Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck

Andante moderato: Sehr gemächlich

In ruhig fliessender Bewegung —

"Urlicht": Sehr feierlich aber schlicht (Mezzo-Soprano) —

Finale, on Klopstock's ode, "Auferstehen" ("Resurrection")

(Chorus and Soloists)

Allentown Symphony Chorus

Chorus Master: Eduardo Azzati

Soprano Soloist: Elizabeth de Trejo

Mezzo-Soprano Soloist: Charlotte Daw Paulsen

This concert is performed without intermission.