



Gustav
MAHLER

DIE ————— THE
SYMPHONIEN ————— SYMPHONIES



neue wege

Gustav Mahlers 4. Symphonie

Es ist der 25. November 1901 und kein anderer als Gustav Mahler persönlich steht im „Großen Kaim-Saal“ in München am Pult: zum ersten Mal kommt seine 4. Symphonie zu Gehör. Mahler selbst hatte den Wunsch, dass die Uraufführung in München mit dem hier ansässigen Kaim-Orchester, den heutigen Münchner Philharmonikern, stattfinden sollte.

Er hatte bereits mehrfach in München gastiert und mit dem Orchester, das seinen hohen Ansprüchen gerecht werden konnte, stets die besten Erfahrungen gemacht.

*Erst ein Jahr zuvor hatte er mit der Münchner Erstaufführung seiner 2. Symphonie mit diesem Orchester nicht nur einen musikalischen Erfolg gefeiert, sondern auch die gewünschte Anerkennung als Komponist erhalten. Beste Voraussetzungen also für einen weiteren Erfolg! So ganz ging Mahlers Plan jedoch leider nicht auf. **Noch nicht ...***

new paths

Gustav Mahler's 4th Symphony

It is the 25th of November 1901 and none other than Gustav Mahler is personally on the podium in the "Great Kaim Hall" in Munich where his 4th Symphony is to be heard for the first time. Mahler himself had wanted the premiere in Munich to take place with the Kaim Orchestra, predecessor of today's Munich Philharmonic Orchestra. He had already made several guest appearances in Munich and had always had the best experience with this orchestra that was able to meet his high standards.

*At the Munich premiere of his 2nd Symphony with this orchestra only a year earlier, he had not only celebrated a musical success, but had also gained desired recognition as a composer. The best conditions for further success! Unfortunately, Mahler's plan did not work out just that way. **Not yet...***



Gustav Mahler: The 4th Symphony



Author: Daniela Wolff

With his 4th Symphony, Gustav Mahler presented both the audience as well as the orchestral musicians of the Munich premiere with new challenges. His first three symphonies had aroused certain expectations, for up to now every new symphony was still larger, even more epic than the previous one. So then what should come next? Mahler may or may not have also asked himself this question, but he was well aware that the work was "so totally different from my other symphonies." And to his audience's surprise, he now presented a seemingly much shorter, simpler and more streamlined work. But isn't there often more complexity in the supposedly simple things than is first assumed?

The symphony's four movements are organized along more traditional lines. Using themes and motifs of the finale in the first three movements interlinks all four symphony movements so that the musical events are directed solely towards the final movement – an approach that is unique in Mahler's symphonic forms. Curtailed in comparison with his first symphonies are the Fourth's performance length, together with its orchestral sound. This latter, while still very compact in the first symphonies, now seems more transparent here, intermittently almost like chamber music. Mahler even does entirely without the trombones and tuba.

The first movement is in traditional sonata form and, according to Mahler, "begins as

if it couldn't count to three, but then gets immediately into multiplication by few, finally reckoning dizzily with millions upon millions." Flickering are reminiscences of Mozart, Haydn, and Beethoven, and whereas Mahler's already known symphonies open very strongly, powerfully and disturbingly, conveyed here is a sense of happiness, joy and cheerfulness in the character of a children's song.

The second movement – Scherzo – is according to Mahler, „mystical, confused and eerie causing your hair to stand on end [...].“ The devil plays a central role in this dance of death – thus, the subtitle of a program note from a concert that Mahler conducted. Embodied by the solo violin tuned a whole tone higher, it's supposed to "sound screaming and raw, as if death were striking up." This effect was even more pronounced on instruments strung at that time with gut strings than on the steel strings used on violins today.

Returning in the third movement that deals with two themes in different variations is a deep, almost meditative calm. The contrast between the two themes and the intensifying variations are the prevalent ideas in the movement's configuration.

In 1892 Mahler had already written five lieder on texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* that he himself described as humor-

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**Interplay
between jest and
seriousness, reality
and imagination**

esques. This also includes *Das himmlische Leben* [The Heavenly Life] as scoring of the poem *Der Himmel hängt voll Geigen* [The sky is full of violins], from the poetry collection by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim. This orchestral song forms both the basis of the final movement and, concurrently, the core of the symphony by linking all the movements together. The lied text set to music is formative for the musical character and thereby does not conform to the enormous finales and powerful endings usually to be found with Mahler. Contrary to any expectations that the music “awakens with joy,” analogous to the last line of the text, the listener anticipates the oppo-

site here: with the comment “morendo,” i.e., dying away, Mahler has the music disappear into nothingness or – if one sees life after death as the underlying theme – into the light.

During Mahler’s lifetime, his symphony with its interplay between jest and seriousness, reality and imagination, with its “as-if” of the play was scarcely understood. And yet he conducted the work eight more times up to his last New York concerts in 1911.

And today? Nowadays, the 4th Symphony is frequently played as one of Gustav Mahler’s most popular works.

II.

In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast

1.2. Flöte
1.2. Oboe
1.2. Klarinette (B)
1. Fagott
1. Horn (F)
Triangel
Becken
Gr. Trommel
1. Solo-Violine
gestimmt in
immer stark hervortretend
und ohne Dämpfer
Violine I
Violine II
Viola
Violoncello
Kontrabass

o. Dpf. (Wie eine Fidel)
sehr zufahrend
sehr hervortretend
m. Dpf. Solo
m. Dpf. Solo
Tutti
Tutti
Tutti pizz.

NB: Der 1. Sologeiger hat sich mit 2 Instrumenten zu versehen, von denen das eine um einen Ganzen höher, das andere normal gestimmt ist. | The first solo violinist needs two instruments, one tuned up a whole tone, the other tuned normally.

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„Wie eine Fidel“: Der Beginn des Scherzos mit den Spielanweisungen für die Solo-Violine

“Like a vielle.”: The beginning of the Scherzo with the notations for the solo violin