



GUSTAV MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO. 9
IN D MAJOR

CHAMBER VERSION
BY KLAUS SIMON



Soloists of the English
Symphony Orchestra
Kenneth Woods *conductor*



GUSTAV MAHLER (7 JULY 1860 – 18 MAY 1911) SYMPHONY NO. 9 IN D MAJOR (1909)

VERSION FOR CHAMBER ENSEMBLE ARRANGED BY KLAUS SIMON

TRACK	DURATION
1. I. <i>Andante comodo</i>	27:12
2. II. <i>Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb</i>	14:57
3. III. <i>Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig</i>	13:28
4. IV. <i>Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend</i>	21:13

TOTAL TIME 1:16:52



'I have gone through so much during the last year and a half that I can scarcely speak of it. How can I attempt to describe such an overwhelming crisis? I can see everything in such a new light; am so much in transformation that it would not surprise me to find myself in a new body (like Faust in the final scene). I am more eager for life than ever....'

Gustav Mahler, 1909

Imagine embarking upon a long sea journey, saying farewell to home, friends, colleagues, familiar sights and places. Such was the fate of Gustav Mahler, as he set sail from Cherbourg to New York in December 1907 to start a new conducting contract at the Metropolitan Opera House. Amidst the regret, the transatlantic crossing was also a chance to escape the tragic events of earlier that year. Mahler's troubles had begun in July with the sudden death of his four-year old daughter Maria, followed soon afterwards by the diagnosis of his own serious heart condition. To add to his woes, Mahler's marriage to the formidable Alma, almost twenty years his junior, had reached a low ebb. But the final blow came when, in response to mounting vitriolic intrigues, Mahler was forced to resign as Director of the Vienna Court Opera.

The beleaguered composer was once again an outsider, exiled from the culture that had raised him above his provincial roots. Then Vienna had

a reputation for double-dealing. Its grandiose architecture concealed a Hapsburg dynasty losing its imperial swagger. Behind the classical facades was a chaos of racial tension, political intrigue, crime and prostitution. The city's citizens drowned their sorrows in hedonistic excess, waltzing themselves into oblivion. Yet for Mahler, Vienna was the home of the symphony, scene of his greatest triumphs, so that his downfall left him profoundly wounded.

Throughout his life, in times of crisis, Mahler had turned for reassurance to his old student friend, the philosopher and playwright, Siegfried Lipiner. Despite a Jewish background, Lipiner had adopted a belief-system based on Christian compassion, rejecting the wrathful God of the Old Testament. Lipiner believed firmly in the afterlife and the power of art to change lives. In his younger days, he had been a disciple of Nietzsche, although the two men profoundly disagreed about Wagner's final music drama, *Parsifal*. Nietzsche found the work's Christian imagery regressive, while Lipiner considered it a model for how art could replace organised religion.

Lipiner was undoubtedly a major influence on Mahler during his formative years, and the pair would have remained close friends but for Alma's jealous disapproval. However, during the spring of 1909, Mahler's former assistant, the conductor Bruno Walter (who directed the Ninth's Symphony's posthumous premiere in 1911), arranged several meetings between the two men. We know little about the content of these sessions,

although Lipiner made a summary in the form of a poem, *Der Musiker spricht* (The musician speaks). The text was presented to Mahler for his 50th birthday, and he will have read verses stating that melody attracts the divine light, and that, just as night becomes day, a period of darkness inevitably leads to a new dawn. Lipiner, himself terminally ill by this time, helped to revive Mahler's spirits by reassuring him about life after death, and his wisdom must surely have helped to shape the Ninth Symphony's philosophical content as it gestated in the composer's mind.

Less than a year before the calamities of 1907, Mahler had completed his 8th Symphony, a monumental choral work based on Goethe's *Faust*, offering an optimistic vision of humanity redeemed by universal love. By comparison, Mahler's first creative response to his *annus horribilis* was sombre and introverted. The symphonic song cycle, *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth) written during 1908, is a setting of ancient Chinese poems. It begins in a state of existential terror, overcome only at the work's end as the soul dissolves in ever-lasting spring. The following year, during the summer of 1909, the Ninth Symphony was drafted in short score. Like *Das Lied*, the work confronts the human condition with searing candour and, nodding discreetly to Goethe's *Faust* and Wagner's *Parsifal*, explores how the trials of human experience transform personal identity.

The symphony's first movement is a vast sonata form in D Major, although any notion of classical balance is shattered by the intensity

of Mahler's expression. An ominous rhythmic motto introduces a slow march, characterised by a sighing motif and bell-like notes on the harp. These elements gradually coalesce into a song of bittersweet longing. The atmosphere is unmistakably Viennese, including a gentle parody of a waltz from Johann Strauss II's, *Freuet euch des Lebens* (Enjoy Life). But dark forces soon cast a shadow. Sinister fanfares whip up a storm of agitation which is met by heroic defiance. Like the 6th Symphony's finale, each episode of struggle ends in catastrophic collapse, before the songlike material gradually reemerges. After the third and fiercest battle, the rhythmic motto from the symphony's opening cuts in like the fall of an axe. Yet the deathblow is not final, as the lyrical material is transformed into an ecstatic funeral march which also serves as a recapitulation. The passage echoes the 'transformation' music from Wagner's *Parsifal*, as well as the mournful orchestral interlude that precedes the soul's liberation in *Das Lied von der Erde*. For Mahler, death meant transition; part of a natural cycle that leads to rebirth. The movement unwinds in a coda suffused with forest murmurs and memories of past delight.

Among Mahler's favourite reading was Dostoyevsky's novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*, which sets out two opposing worldviews. Alyosha is a young monk, full of idealism and compassion, who believes in the redemptive power of divine love. By contrast, his brother, Ivan, is angry and cynical, wanting to 'return his ticket' for life to an incomprehensible deity. In the middle movements of the Ninth Symphony, Mahler adopts a sardonic

tone closer to that of Ivan. The work's second movement, an extended series of *Ländler* (a country cousin of the waltz) begins with a simple rising figure in C major. An injection of boisterous humour soon distorts the rustic charm, adding a satirical edge as the music grows more agitated and complex. At the movement's close, the dance rhythms fragment into silence.

The third movement is a *Rondo Burleske* in A minor, characterised by muscular counterpoint and jarring dissonance, perhaps a witty parody of modern Viennese life full of aimless activity, dispute and intrigue. Mahler dedicated the movement "*To my brothers in Apollo*;" - an ironic gibe at the aesthetic rigidities of academics and critics. The demonic energy only relents when a persistent chorale motif calls a halt; a reminder that divine judgement stands over petty human affairs. A plaintive melody breaks through that develops into an episode of great pathos, anticipating the intense spirituality of the work's finale. But the grotesquerie cannot be restrained for long and, when the noisy counterpoints return, it is with ever more wicked exuberance.

The symphony's *Adagio* finale is a set of double variations in D-flat major, a remote key which marks a dramatic change of atmosphere. This is the moment of decision. Whose worldview will prevail? Alyosha or Ivan? A rhetorical sweep by the violins keeps us in suspense, before a richly harmonised hymn expresses heartfelt grief and remembrance. This material alternates with episodes of free-floating counterpoint,

using extremes of register to evoke deep introversion. The hymn gathers intensity at each repetition, before rising to an impassioned climax, echoing the crises of the symphony's first movement. The music hovers agonisingly above the abyss. Then the answer comes - a resounding, transcendent 'yes' to life. Pent-up emotional tensions now disperse. A quotation from Mahler's song-cycle *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Deaths of Children) alludes to the distant sunlit hills, where children go when they die. Mahler, we feel, is at last reconciled to the loss of his daughter and many dead siblings. A final drawn out cadence completes the symphonic arc, not with an ecstatic vision of heaven, but with an earthly moment of serene acceptance



A BRIEF NOTE ABOUT THE ARRANGEMENT FOR CHAMBER ENSEMBLE

In 2007, the German composer, Klaus Simon, began arranging early 20C masterworks by Mahler, Schoenberg, Berg et al in the style of Arnold Schoenberg's *Society for Private Musical Performances*. Aside from making these pieces available to a wider range of performers and audiences, the reduced forces bring new transparency to complex scores. What is lost in the range of colour and the dramatic impact of a full symphony orchestra is compensated by revealing inner parts and contrapuntal details. The Ninth Symphony marked a step-change in Mahler's orchestral technique, further developing his use of chamber-like textures and fluid contrapuntal lines. Klaus Simon's arrangement of the Ninth (in this recording with single strings) captures the spirit of Mahler's unique sound-world without limiting its expressive intensity.

Hailed by Gramophone as a "symphonic conductor of stature," conductor, cellist, composer, and author Kenneth Woods has worked with the National Symphony Orchestra (United States), Royal Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, and English Chamber Orchestra. He has also appeared on the stages of some of the world's leading music festivals, including Aspen, Scotia, and Lucerne.

Woods has served as artistic director and principal conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra since 2013, as founding artistic director of the Elgar Festival in Worcester since 2018, and as principal guest conductor of the Stratford-upon-Avon-based Orchestra of the Swan from 2010 to 2014. In 2015, he was made the second artistic director of Colorado MahlerFest, one of only two North American institutions (the other being the New York Philharmonic) to have received the Gold Medal of the International Gustav Mahler Society.

Gustav Mahler's music has been a lifelong source of inspiration for Woods, who has conducted acclaimed performances of the symphonies and songs across the Americas and Europe. In 2011, Somm Records released Woods's first Mahler recording of Schoenberg's chamber ensemble versions of Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, which won International Record Review's coveted IRR Outstanding Rosette.

kennethwoods.net

"...Woods' performance of Mahler 2 left no doubt that he is a major Mahler interpreter.... I never heard one more convincing" Joseph Horowitz, author *The Marriage: The Mahler's in New York*

"Woods is one of the pre-eminent Mahler conductors on the planet... as fine a Mahler conductor as I have had the privilege to hear." Guy Rickards, *Musical Opinion*, Gramophone

"Woods knows his Mahler in the minutest detail and has the ability to impart to his musicians the essentials of his interpretation and make them respond spontaneously and enthusiastically." Jim Pritchard (former chair, UK Mahler Society), *MusicWeb International*

"Woods's Mahler... is not just gorgeous, but important. Truly valuable." Dr. David Vernon, author of *Mahler's Eleven Symphonies*

"... an absolutely astonishing recording in many respects... This is a most important issue, and all Mahlerians should make its acquisition an urgent necessity." Robert Matthew Walker, *International Record Review*, Editor in Chief, *Musical Opinion*

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The **English Symphony Orchestra** is an ensemble which in recent years has become synonymous with artistic excellence, innovative and visionary programming, distinctive commissioning and ground-breaking recordings. In the last decade, ESO has established itself as a major force in British musical life under its Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Kenneth Woods, presenting and recording the orchestra's first full length opera (the world premiere of John Joubert's *Jane Eyre*) to overwhelming critical acclaim, presenting the 2015 Classical Music Magazine "Premiere of the Year," (Donald Fraser's orchestration of the Elgar Piano Quintet) and releasing a triumphant series of recordings, including the Complete Piano Concertos of Ernst Krenek (Sunday Times Best Recordings of 24 NI6408 2016) and John Joubert's opera *Jane Eyre* (2017 MusicWeb Opera Recording of the Year).

Founded by William Boughton in 1980, the ESO have a long and distinguished history of collaboration with legendary figures of British music making. As the professional orchestra of Elgar's home city, and orchestra-in-residence of The Elgar Festival, the music of Elgar has long been a central part of the ESO's repertoire. Past ESO collaborators include some of the leading Elgar interpreters of the last 50 years, including conductors Yehudi Menuhin (Principal Guest Conductor 1990-2000) and Vernon Handley (Principal Conductor 2007—8) and soloists Nigel Kennedy, Nicola Benedetti, Steven Isserlis and Alexander Sitkovetsky.

Appropriately for an orchestra based in the city of his birth, the ESO has made many acclaimed recordings of Elgar's music as well as that of major 20th century British composers including Vaughan Williams, Britten, Butterworth and Bridge. The ESO discography also highlights a commitment to the music of our time; in addition to the notable recordings which grew out of the orchestra's affiliation with Sir Michael Tippett, there are recordings of music by John Metcalfe, John Joubert, Nicholas Maw, and Michael and Lennox Berkeley. John McCabe served as the orchestra's Composer-in-Association from 2013 until his death in 2015. Following McCabe's death in 2015, the ESO appointed Philip Sawyers as "John McCabe Composer-in- Association" who was succeeded by David Matthews in 2018 and Adrian Williams from 2020-2021. The ESO's current John McCabe Composer-in-Association is Steve Elcock.

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SOLOISTS OF THE ENGLISH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Violin 1

Zoë Beyers
Leader

Violin 2

Kate Suthers

Viola

Helen Roberts

Cello

Joely Koos

Double Bass

Stephen Warner

Flute/Piccolo

Laura Jellicoe

Oboe/Cor Anglais

Rebecca Wood

Clarinet

Alison Lambert
Sara Temple

E♭ Clarinet

Alison Lambert

Bass Clarinet

Sara Temple

Bassoon

Rosemary Cow

French Horn

James Topp
Craig Macdonald
Michael Gibbs

Trumpet

Stuart Essenhight

Percussion

Graham Bradley

Harmonium

Robert Court

Piano

Michael Young

English Symphony Orchestra

Artistic Director

Kenneth Woods

Leader and Principal Artist

Zoë Beyers

Executive Manager

Sue Voysey

Chair

Jonathan Godfrey

Production Team

Producer

Phil Rowlands

Engineer/Videographer

Tim Burton

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