Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra
May 10 complementary content

Domingo Hindoyan

Domingo Hindoyan was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan musical education programme El Sistema. He studied conducting at Haute Ecole de Musique in Geneva, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor's Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to Daniel Barenboim at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013, and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as the Orchestra's new Chief Conductor in 2020, taking up his position in September 2021. He has now extended his contract with the Orchestra to 2028.

Gustav Mahler

During his lifetime, Gustav Mahler was celebrated as a leading concert conductor – but it would take half-a-century from his death for his own music to be fully appreciated. Mahler was born in 1860 in Bohemia, now part of Czechia, where his father was an innkeeper. Eight of his 13 siblings died in childhood which would deeply influence his later work.

His musical abilities first revealed themselves when he was still a young child, and at the age of 15 he left the family home to study at the Vienna Conservatory. Mahler spent his early musical career as a conductor, and was working at the Leipzig City Theatre when, in 1888, he wrote his first symphony.

By the turn of the 20th Century, a by now middle-aged Mahler had reached the pinnacle of his profession as director of the Vienna Court Opera and principal conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic.
He also had four symphonies and a host of cantatas, orchestral songs and songs with piano to his name – much of his composing being completed during summer holidays from his 'day job'.

The year 1901 turned out to be a landmark one in his life. He started composing what would become his Fifth Symphony, while in November he met and fell for the beautiful and charismatic 22-year-old Alma Schindler and within a month they were secretly engaged, marrying the following March.

Alma Mahler would become not only what some have called a muse for the composer, but also his practical support, running their home and preparing piano scores for many of his works. His constant demands meant she ended up putting her own artistic ambitions (she was a talented pianist and composer) aside.

The final decade of Mahler's life was a busy time. In addition to his conducting career – during the 1910-11 season he had 90 concerts in his diary – he also produced five symphonies (the tenth remaining unfinished), his *Kindertotenlieder* song cycle, and *Das Lied von der Erde* for two male voices and orchestra. He also paid two separate visits to New York.

In 1907, Mahler's elder daughter Maria had tragically died of scarlet fever and around the same time the composer was diagnosed with a heart problem. It was that **defective heart valve** that eventually proved fatal when he went down with a bad throat in New York – the increasingly poorly Mahler making a tortuous journey first to Paris, then Vienna where he died on May 18, 1911, at the age of 50.

Listen to the final movement of Mahler's *Symphony No.9.*

About the Music

Mahler: Symphony No 9
1. Andante comodo [A leisurely walking pace]
2. Im tempo eines gemachlichen Landlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb. [In a leisurely Ländler-tempo. Rather awkward and coarse]
3. Rondo. Burleske. Allergo assai. Sehr trotzig [Very fast. Defiant]
4. Adagio. Sehr langsam [Very slow]

When Gustav Mahler died in 1911, just a few weeks short of his fifty-first birthday, he left two works complete but unperformed: the symphonic song-cycle Das Lied von der Erde ('The Song of the Earth') and the purely orchestral Ninth Symphony. When these were heard for the first time, the year following Mahler's death, many listeners were struck by their intense preoccupation with mortality - highlighted in the texts of Das

Lied von der Erde, and clear enough in the expressive tone of the Ninth Symphony. The composer Alban Berg, who revered Mahler, described the symphony's first movement as 'the expression of an exceptional fondness for this earth, the longing to live in peace on it, to enjoy nature to its depths - before death comes. For he comes irresistibly. The whole movement is permeated with premonitions of death.'

It is easy to see why Mahler might have been haunted by thoughts of death at this time. He was approaching fifty when he completed his Ninth Symphony - and for most people the fiftieth birthday is an important milestone on the road from birth to death. But Mahler also had serious health problems. In 1908, a doctor had diagnosed a heart lesion - a condition that could only get worse. The previous year the elder of his two daughters, Maria, had died of scarlet fever. All this was well known in musical Vienna when the Ninth Symphony was premiered. Speculation soon became certainty: Mahler must have known that he was going to die, and that the Ninth Symphony would be his 'Farewell to Life' - the title his teacher Bruckner had given to the last movement of his own (incomplete) Ninth Symphony.

But there are good reasons to be wary about accepting this reading unconditionally. Mahler may have been shaken by the discovery of his heart problem, but it wasn't until the last year of his life that he began to slacken the pace of his frantically busy life. In 1909, the year after the ominous diagnosis, he had accepted a three-year contract to conduct the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (his first season included an astonishing 46 concerts!). Then in 1910, Mahler had begun, and very nearly completed, a Tenth Symphony - another ambitious orchestral work, beginning where the Ninth left off, but eventually working through to a very different, more positive conclusion. It could well be that Mahler thought that his days in the shadow of death were over - for the moment at least - and that he could now look forward to exploring new musical paths; the Tenth Symphony is full of pointers to possible ways ahead.

Nevertheless, when Berg wrote of the presence of death in the Ninth Symphony, he wasn't simply giving voice to a personal interpretation; the music is full of details that reinforce his words. From very early on - almost from the first bars - the first movement is dominated by a two-note falling figure, like a sigh (first heard on second violins). In the finale this figure returns, but it now falls by two steps - clearly spelling out the leading motif from Beethoven Piano Sonata Les Adieux ('The Farewells'), a work Mahler had played in his teens, to great effect. Beethoven marked his motif Le-be-wohl - 'Farewell'. In the first

movement the two-note **Farewell** sigh emerges after a short introduction, in which cellos and low horn spell out a strange, faltering rhythm; the conductor Leonard Bernstein compared this to Mahler's erratic heartbeat. The exquisite long violin melody that grows from the first sighing figures returns many times during the course of this long movement. Between its appearances there are contrasted episodes: impassioned, frantic, resigned, eerie by turns. One passage - introduced by the 'faltering heart' rhythm on horns, followed by sinister drum taps - is clearly a funeral march. Towards the end of the movement comes a sinister, skeletally scored passage, in which Mahler treats his large orchestra as though it were a much smaller chamber ensemble. It is as though the orchestra itself were fragmenting, breaking down. But it is the sense of the sweetness of life that prevails in the final bars, the orchestration wonderfully delicate and imaginative to the very last note - magically scored for piccolo, harp and string harmonics.

After this, the second movement is a surprise. Suddenly we are transported to an Austrian beer-garden, with coarse, heavy-footed dance tunes. In fact, three kinds of Ländler (country cousin to the sophisticated Viennese Waltz) alternate in this movement: the 'leisurely' first theme, a faster, almost thuggish dance-tune, and a gentle, sentimental slow waltz, leading off with a return of the first movement's two-note 'sigh'. Comical though a lot of this music is, there is something disquieting about it - especially so in the coda, where the first Ländler tune takes on a darker expression.

All this is brusquely thrust aside by the Rondo - or 'Burleske' as Mahler subtitled it. Brilliantly, sometimes garishly scored, this is the movement in which Mahler shows off his contrapuntal skills. But a lot of it has a sarcastic tone, confirmed by Mahler's dedication of this movement 'To my brothers in Apollo' - a raspberry directed at the musical pedants who had found fault with his compositional techniques. At the heart of this movement is an extraordinary bitter-sweet episode, introduced by a sugary slow tune on a solo trumpet. It seems to aspire to higher things, but aspiration is always thwarted. The movement ends as it began, full of sound and fury.

Finally comes the Adagio. In placing the slow movement last, Mahler may have been thinking of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique Symphony, or again of Bruckner's Ninth - both works are overshadowed by thoughts of death. But what Mahler achieves is utterly personal. The first theme (full strings) spells out Beethoven's 'Farewell' theme in full, and there's also a passing echo of the Victorian funeral hymn 'Abide with me', which

Mahler may have heard on one of his visits to New York. This richly sonorous music for the full strings alternates with weird, sparsely-scored passages - more skeletal sounds. Eventually the 'Farewell' theme builds to a massive, desperate climax, which seems to be striving for the transcendent glory of the Eighth Symphony (there is even a quotation from No 8 on horns). The striving is vain however, and the rich textures gradually thin out into the near-emptiness of the final bars: the silences between the slow, quiet phrases are almost unbearably poignant - like the pauses between the breaths of a dying man. At last, the music fades into nothingness.