



GUSTAV MAHLER 1860-1911

Symphony No. 2 in C minor 'Resurrection'

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | I. Allegro maestoso. Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck
[With serious and solemn expression throughout] | 16'55 |
| 2 | II. Andante moderato. Sehr gemächlich [Very leisurely] | 9'22 |
| 3 | III. [Scherzo] In ruhig fließender Bewegung [Calmly flowing] – | 10'25 |
| 4 | IV. 'Urlicht' (Primordial Light): Sehr feierlich, aber schlicht (Choralmässig)
[Very solemn, but simple, like a chorale] – | 3'55 |
| 5 | V. Finale. Im Tempo des Scherzos [In the tempo of the Scherzo] – Langsam [Slowly] –
Allegro energico – Langsam [Slowly] | 28'10 |

SUNG IN ENGLISH. RECORDED 25 SEPTEMBER 1950 IN THE SYDNEY TOWN HALL

Total Playing Time 68'07

Valda Bagnall *soprano*
Florence Taylor *contralto*
Hurlstone Choral Society
Otto Klemperer *conductor*

Sydney Symphony Orchestra

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 2 in C minor 'Resurrection'

'If this is music, then I know nothing of music.'
Hans von Bülow, the legendary conductor who for many years earlier had shown his greater love for the composer Wagner by laying down his wife, Cosima, for his friend, was speaking to Gustav Mahler. The younger man had established himself as the most exciting conductor of his generation with a series of stunning successes with the Budapest Opera, and had been hired in 1891 by the impresario of the Hamburg Opera, Bernhard Pollini. Bülow, director of Hamburg's orchestral subscription concerts, held Mahler's conducting in great esteem: he was a 'first-class opera conductor...who in my opinion equals the greatest (Mottl, Richter etc)', but when it came to Mahler's own music, Bülow was baffled. In 1891, Mahler played through a piano reduction of a long symphonic poem entitled *Todtenfeier* (Funeral Rites) to Bülow, who opined that it 'made *Tristan und Isolde* sound like a Haydn symphony!'

Todtenfeier was conceived by Mahler as a sequel to his First Symphony and had been largely composed in 1888. Mahler vacillated between considering it a movement of a projected symphony or a free-standing symphonic poem. The First Symphony, subtitled the *Titan* after a novel by Jean Paul Richter, was, like Beethoven's *Eroica* and numerous works by Richard Strauss, intended as the musical portrait of a hero. *Todtenfeier* was to be the hero's

funeral rites, and sought, as Mahler put it in a letter some years later, to ask: 'Why did you live, why suffer? Is it all nothing but a huge, terrible joke?' Bülow's response stunned Mahler. Despite recasting *Todtenfeier* as the first movement of his Second Symphony, between 1891 and 1894 Mahler had written only the *Andante*, *Scherzo* and *Urlicht* movements to follow it, and they rely heavily on music that he had already composed. British musicologist Donald Mitchell has suggested that Mahler was 'unable, without a viable program, to complete the great work he had begun.'

Then in 1894 Bülow died in Cairo, and at his funeral in Hamburg the choir sang a setting of *Auferstehung*, the Resurrection ode by the 18th-century religious poet Friedrich Klopstock. Suddenly, Mahler recalled, 'everything was revealed clear and plain to my soul in a flash': Klopstock's poem would provide the basis for the choral finale he had been considering; it would fulfil the work musically and answer the existential questions posed by the earlier movements. Mahler subsequently wrote several versions of a program or description of what the music sought to convey but later in his career tried to suppress them in order to be taken more seriously as a composer of purely abstract music.

The overall 'narrative' of the work, however, remains clear. The first movement opens with a dramatic gesture that recalls the storm with which Wagner's *Die Walküre* begins, and which, as

scholar Michael Kennedy puts it, 'is fissionary material for a host of derivative themes, all centred on C minor, all funeral-march-like in character.' One such theme, which strides through the stormy texture, is in fact the theme which returns in the finale to depict the resurrection of the dead. In the central development section Mahler quotes the *Dies irae* plainchant, that part of the Mass for the Dead which foretells the day of wrath, when the heavens and earth are shaken and consumed by fire. The movement is long and structurally complex, with an enormous variety of colour made possible by the huge orchestra required. Despite using a massively enhanced brass section, Mahler's work is as notable for its kaleidoscope of delicate effects as for its monumental ones, such as the crashing chords which seem to threaten total collapse later in the movement. Its range of mood asks those searching questions, and reflects Mahler's remark, 'You are battered to the earth with clubs and lifted to the heights on angels' wings.'

Mahler's problem, as Kennedy notes, was how to effectively follow such a powerful and complex statement. Eventually he opted for a significant pause – 'about five minutes' is what he specified in the score – between the first and second movements, partly because the second, a short, nostalgic *Andante moderato*, is rather lightweight by contrast, evoking 'the image of a long-dead hour of happiness which now enters your soul like a sunbeam that nothing can obscure'. Cast as a

ländler (a rustic cousin to the waltz) and with a contrasting central section, it is, in Kennedy's words, 'a 19th-century reflection of Haydn's Paris symphonies with a Tchaikovskian pizzicato thrown in for good measure'.

The third movement scherzo is similarly short, but much different in tone. Between 1883 and 1901 Mahler composed numerous songs to folk poetry published in a collection by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim entitled *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn). In 1893, he set 'St Anthony of Padua's Sermon to the Fishes', in which the fish listen intently to the saint's words, and then, like humans, behave exactly, and as badly, as before. The tone of the movement, then, is satirical, and the great German writer Theodor Adorno argued that here Mahler was railing against the alienation of the individual by the world's 'blind functioning'. After arresting timpani beats, the movement is relentless – partly to depict the perpetual motion of the fish, which in turn acts as a symbol for the futility of much human activity; the use of the high-pitched E-flat clarinet and certain effects on the bass drum give the movement an edge of hysteria which culminates in a shattering climax. As Mahler put it, the hero 'despairs of himself and of God. The world and life become a chaotic nightmare; loathing for all being and becoming seizes him with an iron fist and drives him to an outburst of despair.'

Otto Klemperer conducting the
Sydney Symphony Orchestra in 1950



The fourth movement, *Urlicht*, offers some comfort for this despair, in the words of another song from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* to which Mahler, as was his wont, made some alterations.

CONTRALTO

O rose so red!
In man is a nameless need!
And bitter his band of Pain!
The golden gateway of Heav'n I would gain!
A pathway both broad and fair I found;
But came an angel forth to lead me aside then;
Ah no, I would not turn aside then!
My soul is of God and to God would return!
And loving God, most loving God, a light for
guidance lending,
Will lead my steps again to perfect bliss unending!

The simplicity of Mahler's musical means after the breathless energy of the previous movement is breathtaking (and deceptive). The texture of the solo voice joined by a velvety brass chorale actually masks a fluid and complex metrical system. The movement unfolds with a growing sense of ecstasy at the prospect of reunion with God, the vocal line becoming more chromatic (perhaps recalling the world of *Tristan und Isolde*) and the orchestration more inventive and beautiful.

But the music hasn't done with despair and anxiety yet. As in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, inevitably a model for Mahler's work, the finale begins with a *Schreckensfanfare* or fanfare of terror, in this case

the overpowering 'outburst of despair' from the end of the third movement. It then visits a number of contrasting, purely instrumental worlds – like Beethoven again, occasionally recalling episodes from earlier movements. A sense of infinite space is evoked by the use of offstage horn calls described by Mahler as a 'voice in the wilderness' and adumbrating the theme to which he later sets the words 'Believe, my heart, believe'. This in turn leads to what Kennedy calls 'fanfare-fantasias' based on the *Dies irae*. Two cataclysmic percussion crescendos lead into a violent, aggressive (and, to many ears, vulgar) march, larded with militaristic statements of the *Dies irae* theme. Here Mahler depicts the moment when:

The earth quakes, the graves burst open, the dead arise...they all come marching along in a mighty procession: beggars and rich men, common folk and kings, the Church Militant, the Popes. All give vent to the same terror, the same lamentations and paroxysms.

When the tumult and the shouting dies there is an eerie calm in which we hear, offstage, an echo of the Last Trumpet (represented again by brass and timpani), answered by a beautiful flute solo which has come to be known as the Bird of Death. Now, at the very edge of inaudibility, the chorus intones the words of Klopstock's ode with its promise of eternal life, and is joined by the soprano solo. The soprano enters with words by Mahler, to a melody which had become more and more insistent earlier

in the movement, which answer the question of existence posed by the first movement: 'Believe it! Not for nought didst thou have being! For nought thou hast not lived, borne anguish!' As Edward Seckerson writes: 'Relentlessly, Mahler builds his massive forces into an accumulative blaze of rapturous affirmation: voices rise in ecstasy, bells chime, the augmented brass choir swells, and a vision of eternal life unfolds before our eyes, if but for a few moments of glowing certainty.'

CHORUS AND SOPRANO

Rise again, yes, rise again wilt thou, my dust,
when rest is o'er!
Then life immortal, then life eternal,
He thee will give in Realms Supernal!
Soon to bloom anew, thou'rt sown on earth!
The Harvest Lord goes forth, and reaping,
Harvests our souls, now sleeping!

CONTRALTO

Believe it, my heart, believe it!
No loss shalt thou be seeing!
Thine is, thine, yes, all deemed of worth!
Thine, what, sought in vain, caused thee to languish!

SOPRANO

Believe it! Not for nought didst thou have being!
For nought thou hast not lived, borne anguish!

CHORUS

All that being hath, is death pursuing!
Yet it heralds life's renewing!
Fears off be driving!
Prepare thee now, for living!

SOPRANO, CONTRALTO AND CHORUS

O grief! erst keen and potent!
Thou with scorn art treated!
O death! thou dire aggressor!
Now art thou defeated!
On pinions faith for me created,
Upheld by love enduring,
Will I be soaring, to light eyes ne'er
yet penetrated!
Death new life will be procuring!
Rise again, yes, rise again wilt thou, my heart,
in moments blest!
Faith, sin's pow'r daring,
To God, to God shall thee be bearing!

Mahler conducted the three instrumental movements with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1895. The public loved it; the critics didn't. Later that year, again in Berlin, he gave the work in full and it established him as a major European composer. Like Dante and Milton, Mahler has been accused of failing to recreate convincingly the beatific vision. Mahler's view of death and judgment is not that of orthodox Christianity – indeed this work predates his controversial conversion from Judaism to Catholicism by some years. His is an essentially all-encompassing vision. Just as all of the dead equally 'give vent to the same terror, the same lamentations and paroxysms,' all, in Mahler's view, are redeemed and saved. There is no judgment and damnation: 'an overwhelming love lightens our being. We know, and are.'

Gordon Kerry

Valda Bagnall c.1924-1993

Early in her career Australian soprano Valda Bagnall focused on coloratura roles such as the Queen of the Night (*The Magic Flute*), for which she was commended by visiting German soprano Erna Berger. She later chose to devote herself to the expressive possibilities of the lyric repertoire. She made many concert and recital appearances, most memorably as the soprano soloist in the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's English-text version of Mahler's *Resurrection* symphony under Otto Klemperer in 1950, widely considered to be one of the most profound Australian musical experiences of the era. Her other solo appearances with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra included Orff's *Carmina burana* and Haydn's oratorio *The Seasons*. She also performed extensively in regional Australia with the ABC orchestras. In 1956 she sang the role of Susanna (*The Marriage of Figaro*) in the inaugural production of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust Opera Company, which later became Opera Australia. Other noted operatic performances included Joan in the Australian premiere of Honegger's *Joan of Arc* (1962) and Mimì in *La bohème* (1963). Valda Bagnall was active in radio, both on classical broadcasts and light music programs. Aided by her engaging appearance, she made an easy transition to television and performed in broadcast recitals and television operas including the ABC's first television opera *Pagliacci* (1958). She was an advocate for music education in primary schools

and later in life she worked for The Deaf and Blind Institute and The Blind Society.

Florence Taylor 1919-2001

Florence Taylor was born in Papua New Guinea in 1919, the child of Methodist missionaries. She returned to Australia with her family when she was 11, speaking only native Motuan. Initially she pursued a nursing career and had no singing training, but in 1941 she won 2GB's *Amateur Hour*. The prize included tuition with Belgian singer Madame A. Goossens-Viceroy at the Sydney Conservatorium and she blossomed as an oratorio, opera, concert and studio artist. She was soon appearing frequently in all the Australian capital cities as well as regional centres throughout the country, and in 1948 she won Sydney's *Sun Aria* competition, competing against Joan Sutherland among others. Eugene Goossens was one of the adjudicators, and he invited her to sing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. During her career she sang with all the ABC symphony orchestras, working with conductors such as Otto Klemperer, Eugene Goossens and Nikolai Malko. She became the ABC's contralto of choice for major choral performances, and sang *Mamma Lucia* in ABC-TV's pioneering live-to-air telecast of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1965. Although she also toured New Zealand for the NZ Broadcasting Service, she declined to seek international opportunities, instead creating an impressive



Otto Klemperer taking a break during the 1950 Royal Botanic Gardens concert series

Australasian career as a performer and later as a teacher. 'I have no world-shattering international triumphs to my name,' she is quoted as saying; 'I have been a local singer.' In 1986 Florence Taylor was honoured with the Australia Medal for services to music.

Hurlstone Choral Society

The Hurlstone Choral Society was founded in the Sydney suburb of Hurlstone Park in 1920. In the early years its Musical Director was Vivian Peterson; later Musical Directors included Albert Keats and Ivan Rixon. By the 1930s it had emerged as the leading large choir in Sydney – winning its section in local eisteddfods – and was chosen by the ABC to sing with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra when choral works were programmed. In 1941 it entered into an 'exclusive' contract with the ABC, possibly the only Australian choir to have such an ongoing commitment. In 1968, after an attempt at reorganisation and reduction in size on a semi-professional basis under Ivan Rixon from 1964, Peter Seymour became the musical director, and the choir was renamed Sydney Philharmonia and enlarged. Soon after, the Sydney Philharmonia Motet Choir was formed – making early appearances in the ABC's Gold Series – and in 1972 Sydney Philharmonia began presenting its own subscription concert series. Music Directors since Peter Seymour have included John Grundy, Antony Walker, Mats Nilsson and Brett Weymark.

Today Sydney Philharmonia Choirs is Australia's largest choral organisation, with four choirs: the 32-voice Chamber Singers (the Motet choir), the 100-voice Symphony Chorus, the youth-focussed 60-voice Vox and the 300-voice Festival Chorus. The original Hurlstone agreement with the ABC continues to be reflected in the regular presence of the Philharmonia Choirs in Sydney Symphony programming.

Otto Klemperer 1885-1973

On his death in 1973, Otto Klemperer was regarded as one of the 20th century's great masters of the German musical repertory. Representing a conducting tradition that had its origins in Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss, his authoritative interpretations combined high seriousness and austerity with a metaphysical approach. A student of piano and composition, early in his career he impressed Mahler (he was conducting the offstage orchestra in Mahler's Second Symphony) and it was on the composer's recommendation that he was appointed to the New German Theatre in Prague in 1907, making his conducting debut in *Der Freischütz*. He flourished in Germany until 1933, when he emigrated to the USA. He was conductor of the Los Angeles Philharmonic until 1939, when an operation for a brain tumour undermined his health and led to a lean period with few conducting engagements. When he visited Australia in 1950 he was only just beginning to recover from the

setbacks of this and other illnesses, and in 1951 he fractured his hip, requiring him to conduct from a wheelchair for several years. But in 1954, after the death of Toscanini and then Furtwängler, he was hailed as the leading conductor of the German Romantics, and with the rise of LP records he came into great demand in this repertoire. A fond relationship with the Philharmonia Orchestra led to his appointment as 'Principal Conductor for life' in 1959. His architectural grasp meant that he was renowned in Bruckner and in Beethoven, but above all he was acclaimed for his revealing interpretations of Mahler.

Executive Producers Robert Patterson, Lyle Chan
Mastering Albert Zychowski, Sony DACD
Editorial and Production Manager Hilary Shrubbs
Publications Editor Natalie Shea
Booklet Design Imagecorp Pty Ltd
Photos ABC Document Archives and Sydney Symphony

For the Sydney Symphony
Recording Manager Aimee Paret
Project Manager Baz Archer
Concert Programs Editor Yvonne Frindle
Marketing Communications Manager Georgia Rivers
AYO Music Presentation Fellow Angharad Davis

ABC Classics thanks Alexandra Alewood and Melissa Kennedy.

© 2007 Australian Broadcasting Corporation.
© 2007 Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Distributed in Australia and New Zealand by Universal Music Group, under exclusive licence. Made in Australia. All rights of the owner of copyright reserved. Any copying, renting, lending, diffusion, public performance or broadcast of this record without the authority of the copyright owner is prohibited.