MAHLER
SYMPHONY No.1 "TITAN"

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UTAH SYMPHONY
THIERRY FISCHER, MUSIC DIRECTOR

Gustav Mahler

MAHLER: SYMPHONY NO. 1

The work recorded here is, of course, known everywhere as Mahler's First Symphony. That is not, however, what Mahler thought he was writing at the time, and it took him several years to decide quite what he had wrought (and, in the process, to drop one of the movements). Was this a symphony, or did it belong rather to that alternative, more modern category, the symphonic poem?

It was as an example of this latter type that the work was performed for the first time, on November 20, 1889, in Budapest, where Mahler had a post as opera conductor—though it was at the city's main concert hall, the Vigadó, that he conducted his "Symphonic Poem." At the next performance, in Hamburg four years later, the composition was billed as "Titan, a tone poem in symphony form," becoming "Titan, symphony" the following year in Weimar, then finally and fully, reduced from five movements to the standard four, "Symphony in D major" in Berlin in 1896. By that time, Mahler had completed his Second Symphony and most of his Third; he knew what he was about.

Some of the ambiguity, however, remains. In a tradition going back through Liszt and Berlioz to Beethoven, this is a symphony that by no means discounts narrative, even though its composer was in two minds about how much of the story to reveal, and what story. "Titan," the title the piece briefly acquired in 1893-4, to be often revived today, presents a conundrum, for at different times Mahler seems to have explained it either with reference to a novel of the same name by Jean-Paul or simply to stand for a strong heroic figure. Jean-Paul, a contemporary of Beethoven, was one of Schumann's favorite authors, and the protagonist of his *Titan* is a man who flourishes by virtue of his natural gifts and good sense while others, obedient to doctrine (religious, social, political, philosophical), fall by the wayside. Of course, it is possible that there is no either-or here, that Mahler was attracted by the title without going very far into the book. And the same may be true of another Jean-Paul title, *Blumen-, Frucht- und Dornenstücke*, on which Mahler drew in naming the first part of his work for its 1893 performance "From Days of Youth: Flower, Fruit and Thorn Pieces."

In handbills and program books, the work at this early time was always described as falling into two parts, the second comprising the big slow movement and finale, and this 1893

performance was the one for which Mahler supplied by far his most explicit commentary, including titles for all the movements. "Spring and no end!" is the first, with the added note: "The introduction represents the awakening of nature from long winter sleep." Then come "Blumine" (the movement he had re-used from a theater score and would soon cut) and the scherzo "With full sails," followed by "Aground!" and "Dall'Inferno" in the second part, which is given the overall title "Commedia humana." Mahler offers much more detail for the penultimate movement, which he describes as "a funeral march 'in Callot's manner'," referring here to another writer of a hundred years before, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and his *Fantasiestücke in Callot's Manier* (also a lodestar for Schumann), where the reference is to a seventeenth-century printmaker whose works included images of grotesque dwarves. Behind this movement, Mahler goes on, is "a picture known to all children in Austria, 'The Hunter's Funeral'," in which forest animals are escorting their deceased foe on a bier. In a gesture, then, very typical of Mahler—a gesture essential to what we mean by "Mahlerian"—the music enacts at once the awesome drama of what it is to be human and the naive imagery of a woodcut in a children's book. It fuses Dante with a folk tale.

Of course, the real subject of the symphony, as of all Mahler's others, is Mahler—or, rather, the self-projection the composer invented to wander through these vast musical spaces and take us with him, exemplifying and demonstrating the human spirit in its grandeur and its grandiosity, its tragedy and its humor, its full disclosure and its masquerades. If, as Pierre Boulez once suggested, Mahler's whole output is one long novel, then this symphony is its opening chapter—or one of them, for by the early months of 1888, when most of the compositional work was done, its author had already achieved a concert-length narrative cantata, *Das klagende Lied*, and a dozen or so songs, including the orchestral cycle *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Drawing on these early works in places, Mahler absorbs his apprenticeship. The awakening is that of his own artistic personality, real and imaginary: the composer, working with pen and paper, and the protagonist of the symphony-story. In both these senses, he is the titan.

The beginning immediately puts us in a strange place. All the violins and violas, plus some of the cellos, play a super-high A, a note near the top of a normal piano keyboard, while the rest of the cellos and all the basses also sound A, but in lower octaves. "Wie ein Naturlaut," Mahler inscribes in the score: "Like a nature

sound." So it is, almost like something resonating in the distance, unseen, perhaps hidden in the depths of a forest. It is also uncanny, as nature often is when we meet it, at once familiar and removed. And it continues, while the woodwinds climb down in fourths and the clarinets break in with something like a military signal, or more the memory of a military signal. Oboes sign off, and this whole first paragraph is repeated with variation, the "signal" now with trumpets. Third time round, a cuckoo is added on clarinet (again a falling fourth), completing the scene: woodland, summer, sounds from a barracks at the edge—a scene such as Mahler might have witnessed as a boy on a stroll from his home in the Bohemian town of Iglau. And soon, floating into the boy's head, or again heard from afar, comes a folk song strain on horns, perhaps an image of singing at his father's tavern.

One might go on and tell the whole story of the symphony in words, but that is only because the music is so compelling and so rich in reference—reference to sounds and sensations in the outer world, and cross-reference within itself, as one passage folds over another. Some of those cross-references have already occurred, in the threefold nature of this introduction and in its dependence everywhere on the interval of a fourth. There will

be many more. For instance, a passage of ominous chromatic rising, when the super-high A has at last dissolved into silence, leads to the main theme, introduced by the cellos and springing once more from a descending fourth.

Here another kind of reference is added, for this melody comes from the second of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, a song in which the wayfaring hero of the cycle is cheerfully greeted by a bird and a flower. The blithe tone is retained in the symphony, but so is the slightly unsettling outdoor atmosphere, the feeling of a misfit between the songful tune and its setting, in terms of both context and accompaniment—a separation that is, again, a primary characteristic of Mahler's music. This whole passage is repeated before it all vanishes, and we are back at the opening, just with flecks of the tune floating in the air. Gradually the song melody is reassembled and set going again, but it still seems not quite fully embedded in the symphony, and the outcome is a sequence of wrenching twists, from which the tune escapes for the final peroration. This brings back fanfaring motifs from the introduction, all in a bright, carefree, playful atmosphere—a brilliant resolution, but still a little unstable, a little unreal.

There is an immediate motivic link from here to the scherzo, whose accompaniment figure starts out from a falling fourth. Above this bounces a dance in A major, a Ländler, such as Mahler often incorporated in his symphonies, perhaps again recalling that tavern in Iglau. Typical, too, is the irony, in how, for instance, the first part of the movement just comes to a stop, or how the second part has clarity becoming confusion, or how the brilliance is exaggerated. The trio section goes on dancing, but at a more relaxed tempo, with greater warmth, and also with the intimacy of a reduced orchestra. Its first part is in F, its second more mobile in tonality, with memories of the scherzo returning, first on trumpets. Then comes the scherzo repeat, abbreviated and hastening to a conclusion as heightened as that of the first movement.

It is yet again with the motif of a falling fourth that the slow movement opens, this time on timpani in the rhythm of a funeral march. Though we may not want to hear rabbits and foxes treading softly here, Mahler's program certainly accords with the movement's irony, stacked on several levels. The regular quarter notes form the backdrop first of all for a children's round, "Bruder Martin," the Austrian version of "Frère Jacques," regularly sung in the minor mode (here D minor). This innocent newcomer is

initially intoned by instruments in the bass register—double bass, bassoon, muted cellos, and tuba—on its way to being taken up across the orchestra, though below the oboe's piping counter-subject. The slowly oscillating fourths continue, together with a hint of the round in the background, while the foreground is taken over by a klezmer-style dance that is soon marked "With parody." When this has gone by, and still with the same pulsing and ambience, a theme enters in G major, "Very simple and plain, like a folk song"—music new to this movement but drawn directly from the end of the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, where the wayfarer discovers peace. The movement's final section restores "Bruder Martin," but at first in E flat minor, and now with a new variation on trumpets. When the klezmer music is laid on top of this, an almost Ivesian dissonance of speed and character results, but the music is already back in D minor, and soon it is settling towards its close.

A shock awakening comes with the opening of the finale, setting the whole orchestra awhirl until trumpets and trombones start insisting on a rising shape, which soon grows into a boldly asserted march. This grows more vehement until it falls apart, and out of the smoke there appears a glistening melody on the strings, "Very songful." The melody reaches in the direction of a

climax, but the time is not right, and the line falls back and into stillness. From this, the cellos start to rise ominously in what is not the first reminiscence of the initial movement. The storm of the beginning is revisited, until, out of its debris, three muted trumpets lift up a golden transformation of the movement's starting idea. This is evidently the goal, but the chimes of triumph that greet it are rapidly subjected to mockery and so to a resumption again of the storm music. When the golden image is found again, its acclamation goes unchallenged—and yet this is still not the end.

It is as if the parade has passed by, and we find ourselves back in the landscape of the very start of the symphony, complete with stationary octaves, cuckoo, and song. This is, of course, not where we should be, and there is a moment of seeming uncertainty about just where we should. Then the oboe reminds everyone of a passionate melody that the strings readily take up, though this leads nowhere, and the violas have to urge a new beginning, in the form of the march again, in the minor mode. That eventually generates conditions under which the golden ultimate motif can appear for the third time, now fully and truly the destination, bringing the symphony to a victorious, even titanic, end in D major.

<div align="right">—Paul Griffiths</div>

THE UTAH SYMPHONY, celebrating its 75th anniversary in the 2015-16 season, is one of America's major symphony orchestras and a leading cultural organization in the Intermountain West. It is recognized internationally for its distinctive performances, commitment to music education programs, and recording legacy.

Founded in 1940, the Utah Symphony became recognized as a leading American ensemble largely through the efforts of Maurice Abravanel, Music Director from 1947 to 1979. During his tenure, the orchestra undertook four international tours, released numerous recordings and developed an extensive music education program.

The Utah Symphony has performed in many of the world's most prestigious concert halls including Carnegie Hall, at the Kennedy Center, Musikverein, Konzerthaus, Philharmonie, Schauspielhaus, Gewandhaus, Royal Festival Hall and Teatro Colón. In the 2015-16 season the orchestra returns to Carnegie Hall for a concert in honor of the Utah Symphony's 75th anniversary. In addition to numerous regional and domestic tours, including most recently the Mighty 5® Tour of Southern Utah's National Parks, it has embarked on seven international tours.

The orchestra has released more than 100 recordings and has been nominated for Grammy Awards for albums with Maestro Abravanel (Honegger's *Le Roi David*, Bloch's *Sacred Service* and Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*) and Michael Tilson-Thomas (Copland's Old American Songs). A pioneering cycle of Mahler Symphonies conducted by Abravanel was recorded between 1963 and 1974 and included the first commercial stereo recordings of the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies. The recordings also marked the first complete Mahler cycle recorded by an American orchestra.

THIERRY FISCHER, Music Director of the Utah Symphony since 2009, has revitalized the orchestra with creative programming and critically acclaimed performances that have drawn consistently full houses. Highlights of his tenure include complete symphony cycles of Mahler in commemoration of former Utah Symphony Music Director, Maurice Abravanel, complete Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Nielsen cycles, a multi-season Stravinsky and Haydn symphony cycle and a tour of Utah's five national parks. Mr. Fischer has also initiated a major commissioning program in Utah that has produced new works by Simon Holt, Michael Jarrell, Nico Muhly, Andrew Norman, and Augusta Read Thomas.

Mr. Fisher has guest conducted orchestras as diverse as the Atlanta, Boston, Cincinnati and Detroit symphonies, the BBC Symphony, Czech Philharmonic, Philharmonia (London), Oslo Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Salzburg Mozarteumorchester, and the Scottish and Swedish Chamber orchestras, among others.

Mr. Fischer began his music career as Principal Flute in Hamburg and at the Zurich Opera. He made his conducting debut leading the Chamber Orchestra of Europe. He served as Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Ulster Orchestra from 2001-06 and Chief Conductor of the Nagoya Philharmonic from 2008-11 (now the orchestra's Honorary Guest Conductor), and Principal Conductor of the BBC National Orchestra of Wales from 2006-2012.

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NOTE: Names in italics indicate extra performers.

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We at Soundmirror believe, that in a good and successful recording, the sound has to serve the music. While an important goal is to truthfully represent the acoustical event in the hall, another is to capture the composer's intention reflected in the score and its realization by the performer. To achieve these goals, extensive collaboration and communication between the artists and the recording team are of utmost importance.

Listening to the Utah Symphony Orchestra play in Maurice Abravanel Hall, and based on our experience of making orchestral surround recordings in a number of different venues, we chose 5 DPA 4006 microphones as our main microphone array. Supplementing those with "spot mics" to clarify the detail of the orchestration, we worked toward realizing above goals. Extensive listening sessions with Maestro Fischer and orchestra musicians were crucial in refining the final balance.

This recording was made and post produced in 64fs DSD on a Pyramix workstation to give you, the listener, the highest sound quality possible.

We hope you will enjoy listening to this recording as much as we enjoyed making it! —Mark Donahue, John Newton and Dirk Sobotka

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