

Program Notes

by April L. Racana

Fri. September 15, The 895th Sundry Hall Subscription Concert**Gustav Mahler** (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 2 in C minor, “Resurrection”

One of the great composers in the Austro-German tradition, Mahler was well known as a conductor as well. He completed nine symphonies and numerous orchestral songs, not only expanding the size of the ensembles, but also incorporating new instrumental explorations in various combinations. In addition, he infused song (or ‘lied’) into his symphonies. His exposure as a child to a large repertoire of folksongs had great effect on his themes, as can be heard in this symphony, as well as many of his other works.

Mahler’s Second Symphony, subtitled *Auferstehung* (Resurrection), initially began as a one-movement symphonic work called *Todtenfeier* (Funeral Rite) in 1888, which he had written immediately following his First Symphony and intended as a tribute to the hero from that work. Work on the *Andante* that would ultimately become the second movement began the following year, but it would take several more years before the remaining movements took shape.

Mahler went to Hamburg in 1891 where he became acquainted with Hans von Bülow and in September of that year played *Todtenfeier* for him, receiving less than warm accolades for his work. However the composer persevered and by the summer of 1893 he had completed the *Andante* begun earlier. He also began work on a scherzo, which was based on a song written for *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* called *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* (St. Anthony of Padua’s Sermon to the Fish), and would become the third movement. Another *Wunderhorn* song Mahler composed about the same time, *Urlicht* (Primal Light) would also find its way into this symphonic work as the fourth movement, with an alto soloist introducing the first vocal sounds of the work that would lead into the final movement with its choral climax. (Some scholars have compared this to Beethoven’s use of a vocal soloist in his Ninth Symphony before the introduction of the chorus in the last movement.)

The closing chorale Mahler envisioned was a struggle for the composer, uncertain as to what text to use. It wasn’t until the spring of 1894 that he heard Friederich Gottlob Klopstock’s *Die Auferstehung* (Resurrection Ode) at the funeral of his mentor Hans von Bülow, and realized then that this was the text he was meant to use to close his Second Symphony: “It flashed on me like lightning, and everything became plain and clear in my mind!” Mahler would complete the entire work within three months, adding text of his own to Klopstock’s to complete the finale. Although the first three movements were premiered in March of 1895

with Mahler conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, the entire work was premiered in December with the composer again conducting the same ensemble.

Over the years Mahler had written up various program notes describing his intentions for each movement, but later withdrew these. However scholars do tend to agree, based on these notes that the first movement is meant to be a tribute to the hero in his First Symphony, while the second movement offers a nostalgic reflection on one's life. The third movement seems to question our purpose in life as depicted by St. Anthony's Sermon to the Fish, while the fourth movement offers a gentle hope in life after death: "I am from God and shall return to God!" The final movement depicts the range of emotions found in the Last Judgment, the chorus eventually making its entrance along with the soprano soloist, highlighting the resurrection theme: "Rise again, yes, you will rise again!"

Additional text for the fourth movement "Primal Light" from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*:

<p>O Röschen rot! Der Mensch liegt in größter Not! Der Mensch liegt in größter Pein! Je lieber möcht' ich im Himmel sein!</p> <p>Da kam ich auf einen breiten Weg, Da kam ein Engelein und wollt' mich abweisen.</p> <p>Ach nein! Ich ließ mich nicht abweisen! Ich bin von Gott und will wieder zu Gott! Der liebe Gott wird mir ein Lichtchen geben, Wird leuchten mir bis in das ewig selig' Leben!</p>	<p>O little red rose! Man lies in greatest need! Man lies in greatest pain! How much rather would I be in Heaven!</p> <p>Then I came upon a broad pathway; An angel came and wanted to send me away.</p> <p>Ah no! I would not be sent away! I am from God and will return to God. Dear God will give me a little light, Will light my way to eternal, blissful life!</p>
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And additional text from the final movement "Resurrection" with the opening two stanzas of text written by Friederich Gottlob Klopstock, and the remaining text by Mahler himself to close the work:

<p>Aufersteh'n, ja, aufersteh'n wirst du, mein Staub, nach kurzer Ruh! Unsterblich's Leben! Unsterblich Leben wird, der dich rief, dir geben.</p> <p>Wieder aufzublüh'n wirst du gesät! Der Herr der Ernte geht Und sammelt Garben, Uns ein, uns ein, die starben.</p>	<p>Rise again, yes, you will rise again, My dust after a short rest! Immortal life! Immortal life He, who called you, will grant you.</p> <p>To bloom again you are sown! The Lord of the Harvest goes And gathers in like sheaves, Us who have died.</p>
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O glaube, mein Herz, o glaube:
Es geht dir nichts verloren!
Dein ist, ja dein, was du gesehnt,
Dein, was du geliebt,
was du gesritten!

Oh believe my heart, oh believe:
Nothing will be lost to you!
Yours, yes yours is all that you have desired,
Yours, what you have loved,
What you have fought for.

O glaube:
Du wardst nicht umsonst geboren!
Hast nicht umsonst gelebt, gelitten!

Oh believe.
You were not born in vain!
You have not lived in vain, nor suffered in vain!

Was entstanden ist, das muß vergehen!
Was vergangen, auferstehen!
Hör' auf zu beben!
Bereite dich zu leben!

All that has come into being must perish!
All that has perished must rise again!
Cease from trembling!
Prepare yourself to live!

O Schmerz! Du Alldurchdringer!
Dir bin ich entrunnen!
O Tod! Du Allbezwinger!
Nun bist du bezwungen!

Oh Pain, piercer of all things!
From you I have been wrested!
Oh Death, conquerer of all things!
Now you are conquered!

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir errungen,
In heißem Liebesstreben
Werd' ich entschweben
Zum Licht, zu dem kein Aug' gedrunnen!
Sterben werd' ich, um zu leben!

With wings which I have won,
In love's passionate struggle,
I shall soar upwards
To the light which no eye has penetrated!
I shall die, so as to live!

Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du,
Mein Herz, in einem Nu!
Was du geschlagen,
Zu Gott wird es dich tragen!

Rise again, yes, you will rise again,
My heart, in an instant!
What you have conquered,
Will lead you to God.

Work composed: January, 1888 – 18th December, 1894 **World premiere:** 13th December, 1895
Instrumentation: 4 flutes (1-4th doubling on piccolo), 4 oboes (3rd,4th doubling on English horn), 2 Es-clarinets, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling on bass clarinet), 4 bassoons (3rd, 4th doubling on contrabassoon), 10 horns, 6 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, 2 timpano, percussion (bass drum, snare drum, triangle, cymbals, 2 tam-tam, glockenspiel, bells (indefinite pitch), rute), 2 harps, organ, strings, soprano solo, alto solo, chorus
[Banda] 4 horns, 4 trumpets, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, triangle)

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