

Bach and Mahler

by William Hoffman (May 2012)

Although separated by more than a century and a half of music history, the now-iconic figures of Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) and Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) share important musical connections as well as historical-biographical commonalities. Bach's influence on Mahler is intensive and extensive, as revealed in the later composer-conductor's music and related activities. In a larger sense, they share a unique experience involving their times, common destiny and influence on the future.

Their biographies and activities show important parallels. Both were born and raised in rural, German-speaking lands with a growing national consciousness and psyche. Initially they were considerably self-taught with key mentors and gravitated toward larger communities. Eventually each found his musical calling in key musical cities primarily as keyboard virtuosi, music directors, and cultural participants, not as composers whose musical skills, genius and visions would transcend their surroundings. They commanded and performed an enormous amount of music and mined the treasure of contemporary interests in musical forms and structures, especially the dance. After their deaths, a half century past before the significance of their music was fully recognized. Today, that significance is assured and honored

Ironically, Bach and Mahler are now seen as key pivotal figures – participants -- in their changing worlds. Bach brought to culmination and summation the so-called “Baroque Era” (1600-1750), then known as the “common-practice period,” and died in 1750 exactly on the cusp of the beginning of the Modern Era of liberation, learning, industrialization, science, technology and urbanization. In essence Bach's passing marked the end of the dominant spiritual world he celebrated and the emergence of the rational world.

This is figuratively known as the shift from “Bach's Circle to Mozart's Arrow,” from the sphere of traditional connections and reaffirmations to the sphere of presumed progress and seeming perfection. Mahler stood at the end of the Classical-Romantic period and with his music created a new world reflecting the 20th Century's struggle with the currents of the apocalyptic, irrational, and existential. The concept of “Bach's Circle and Mozart's Arrow” is the title of “An Essay on the Origins of Musical Modernity,” by Karol Berger, an exhaustive (420-page) study (University of California Press, 2007) of the pan-musical currents generated by Bach, nurtured to maturity by Mozart and the First Viennese School and transformed by Mahler and the Second Viennese School.

Beyond their unparalleled musical talents and creativity, Bach and Mahler shared profound spiritual, philosophical, and metaphysical interests while driven by biographical and historical influences. Both grew up and raised families surrounded by the death of siblings and children. Both struggled with the meaning of existence, the expression of their gifts, and conflicts with the masters they served. Both had an intense interest in matters spiritual, from Bach's Lutheran orthodoxy to Mahler's absorption in elements of Catholicism, particularly Resurrection, Pentecost, and Purgatory. Both faced charges of uncompromising and obsessive personalities, showing certain excesses in their music bordering on what might be described as a mannerist's attitude. Meanwhile, both enjoyed home life, intense music making, creative and intellectual collaborations, good spirits, nature, and the love of talented wives.

The key to the Bach-Mahler connection was Mahler's possession of the entire 46 volumes of the Bach collected works, published by the *Bach Gesellschaft* (BG) between 1850 and 1900, half of which involves the vocal music of the sacred cantatas, Passions, sacred songs, and motets, as well as the instrumental music of the Orchestral Suites and violin and clavichord concerti. His name is found in the BG subscribers' list from Hamburg as Music Director (1891-97). “Mahler's admiration for Bach was certainly wide and deep, and, as Mahler grew older, came to mean more and more to him, and, also (I believe), to have a progressive influence on his own music,” says Donald Mitchell in <*Gustav Mahler: The Wunderhorn Years*> (London: Faber & Faber, 1975: 346).

This Bach affect on Mahler “was surely influenced by his possession of the Bach” collection, says Mitchell. This is supported by the recollections of Mahler’s long-time companion, Natalie Bauer-Lechner (also listed in the BG, Vienna), from 1890 to 1901 and his wife Alma, 1901-1911. Both recall the collection as the only music in his composing summer-houses in the Austrian Alps as Mahler studied Bach’s music and played it on the piano. Later he obtained performing scores with numerous rehearsal markings as conductor of the Vienna and New York Philharmonic Orchestras.

Other historical facts bearing on Bach’s influence and Mahler’s receptivity and expression exist in broad outlines and anecdotes. They begin, as with many composers, in Mahler’s early study of the <*Well-Tempered Clavier*>. Next is Mahler’s first major tenure as assistant conductor to Arthur Nikish at the Leipzig opera house, 1886-1888, in the Saxon city of Bach’s last tenure as sacred cantor and city music director (1723-50). With the opera house closed during Lent, Mahler availed himself of the opportunity to learn the Passion music of Bach first hand. The Thomaskantor, Wilhelm Rust, who had produced 26 volumes of the “old” Bach edition (BG) between 1855 and 1881, inaugurated the tradition of continuously performing Bach cantatas, Passions, and motets beginning in 1880. In 1893 Gustav Schreck succeeded Rust.

These were Mahler’s early formative years when he discovered the world of Armin and Brentano’s folk collections of “The Youth’s Magic Horn” to be set to song, forged his *First* (“Titan”) *Symphony* and struggled with <*Das Klagende Lied*> (The Song of Lament), an archaic cantata form containing his first “Mahler-ish” music he preserved and in its original version having been rejected by both Brahms and Liszt, champions primarily of Bach’s keyboard music.

Specific Influences

Particular influences involve Mahler’s early interest in spiritual and folk elements, especially as found in his song-cycle, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth’s Magic Horn) and its profound impact on Mahler’s formative first four symphonies, composed prior to 1900, with their spiritual and metaphysical concerns. During this time, Mahler advanced from opera posts at Leipzig to director at Budapest (1888-91), Hamburg (1891-97), and finally Vienna (1897-1907).

In addition, Mahler in all his first four symphonies recycles song from *Wunderhorn* and his own *Songs of a Wayfarer*, as well as original themes found throughout his *Third* and *Fourth Symphonies*. The best early example, a slumber song, is found in three works: In the “Waldmärchen” Part 1 (later omitted) in <*Das Klagende Lied*>, composed about 1878-80, when the fair boy finds the red flower and falls asleep; at the “Leise, bis zum Schless” (m.30), “Auf der Strausse steht ein Lindenbaum” in the closing “Songs of a Wayfarer,” “Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz,” composed about 1883-85 [**MUSIC A**];

music A

Songs of a Wayfarer No. 4.

26 *Alla Marcia*
Durchaus mit geheimnisvoll schwermütigen Ausdruck (nicht schleppen)

pp

Voice: Die zwei blau - en Au - gen von mei - nem Schatz, die ha - ben
When your eyes are shin - ing I leave your side I know you

Piano: *pp*

mich in die wei - te Welt ge - schickt. Da - musst' ich Ab - schied
ne'er can be mine though you are near and I must say fare -

pp *espres.*

neh - men vom al - ler - lieb - sten Platz! O - Au - gen blau wa - rum habt
- well - now to all - I hold most dear! O - eyes of blue that I must

29 *Letzter Satz zum Schluss*

sempre pp

Voice: Auf der Stra - ße steht ein
By the way - side stands a

Piano: *pp*

Lin - den - baum, da - hab' ich zum er - sten Mal im Schlaf ge - ruht!
lin - den tree and in its sweet shade in - sleep I long have lain.

30

Un - ter dem Lin - den - baum! Der hat sei - ne Blü - then ü -
Un - der the lin - den tree. Where blos - soms fell gent - ly down

mich ge - schneit da
cov - ered me. An -

and quoted instrumentally in the closing trio section preceding the A section “Bruder Martin” song in the Scherzo of the “First Symphony,” composed about 1884-88. A slumber song in Bach is the closing “rest in the grave” chorus, “Ruht voll, ihr heiligen Gebeine” (Rest well, ye holy limbs), a $\frac{3}{4}$ time menuet, in the <St. John Passion> [MUSIC B].

Sopran. *p* §
 Ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ihr hei-li-gen Ge - bei - ne, die ich nun wei-
 Rest well, oh sa - viour, may Thy sleep be bless - ed, that I, no more,

Alt.
 Ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ihr hei-li-gen Ge - bei - ne, die ich nun wei-te
 Rest well, oh sa - viour, may Thy sleep be bless - ed, that I, I no mo

Tenor.
 Ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ihr hei-li-gen Ge - bei - ne, die ich nun wei - - ter
 Rest well, oh sa - viour, may Thy sleep be bless - ed, that I, no more, may

Bass. *p*
 Ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ihr hei-li-gen Ge - bei - ne, die ich nun weiter nicht b
 Rest well. oh sa - viour, may Thy sleep be bless - ed, that I, no more, may be d

ter nicht be - wei - ne, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, und bringt auch mich, bringt auch
 may be dis - tres - sed, Rest here in peace, and lead Thou me, lead T

nicht be - wei - ne, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, und bringt auch mich, bringt auch
 be dis - tressed, Rest here in peace, and lead Thou me, lead Thou

nicht be - wei - ne, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, und bringt auch mich, bringt auch
 be dis - tressed, Rest here in peace, in peace, and lead Thou me, lead Thou

wei - - - - ne, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, ruht wohl, und bringt auch mich, bringt auch
 tres - - - - sed, Rest here in peace, in peace, and lead Thou me, lead Thou

Mahler's early use of previously composed materials is as pervasive as Bach's later use, particularly of parody (new text underlay) or paraphrase in his feast day oratorios for Christmas, Easter, Ascension and Pentecost (lost), the *St. Mark Passion*, and as contrafaction from German to Latin in the *Mass in B Minor* and the four *Kyrie-Gloria Mass* settings. Bach also made extensive reuse of instrumental and vocal materials involving Köthen serenades and orchestral suites as well as Weimar and Leipzig concerti and chorale melodies developed extensively in his early organ chorale preludes.

Rust, who championed Bach's parodied works, and Maher cut against the 19th Century grain that championed originality through struggle and who often condemned borrowings as self-plagiarism, annexation or appropriation, conflation, and minimalization, rather than as Bach and Mahler used them as synthesis, explication, and transformation. Accepted only were instrumental theme and variations, surviving from the Baroque, as a display of compositional ability, and piano paraphrases of opera arias.

Bach's vocal music forms such as the recitative and chorale probably inspired Mahler to further expand the vocal elements in the symphony as a musical form involving his five vocal-orchestral works: Symphonies No. 2, "Resurrection"; Nos. 3, "Nature"; No. 4, "Ode to Heavenly Joy"; and No. 8, "Symphony of a Thousand"; and the recitative in the song-symphony, *<Das Lied von der Erde>* (The Song of the Earth). Throughout Mahler's ten designated symphonies, chorales are found vocally in the finale of the "Resurrection Symphony", the alto aria "What Night Tells Me" in the Symphony No. 3; the Saints' Chorale interlude in the Finale of Symphony No. 4, and Part 1, the German Organ Mass, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, of the Symphony No. 8. Instrumental chorales are found in Symphonies 1/1, 2/5, 3/6, 4/4, 5/3,5, 6/4, 7/1, 8/2, 9/1-4, and 10/1,5.

Mahler, like Bach, made intensive use of various musical structures, whether as basic symmetrical tripartite or expanded tri-partite forms, particularly in the (sometimes multiple) concertante scherzo movements of all 11 Mahler "Symphonies," similar to the basic *da-capo* arias of Bach's vocal music. Both used extensive forms of rondo or repetition, Mahler most notably in his symphony slow movements (Nos. 3/6, 4/3, 5/4, 6/2, 9/1,4, and 10/1/5), and Bach in his opening and closing choruses of all three Passion of Matthew, John, and Mark.

Dance Styles

Dance-style and influence is profound and pervasive in both the works of Bach and Mahler. Notable in Bach are the dance-style choruses and arias in virtually all his vocal music, particularly gigue, pastorale, siciliano and menuet, as well as the instrumental French overtures, bourees, and gavottes. In Mahler are the complex scherzi in every symphony, particularly the extended movements with extra-dance influences and contrasting, often multiple trios.

This is notable especially in the funeral march in Symphony No. 1/3, the waltz-like ländler in Symphony No. 2/2, the song "St. Anthony's Sermon to the Fish" in Symphony No. 2/3, the minuet in the B sections (ABABA) of Symphony No. 3/2, the march interludes in Symphony No. 3/3, the exquisite sacred bell-song in Symphony No. 3/5, the ABABA Devil's Dance Scherzo with solo violin in baroque scordatura tuning in Symphony No. 4/2, the giant waltz scherzo of Symphony No. 5/3 with brass chorale anticipating the Finale, and the lumbering dance with grotesque minuet trio in the "Tragic" Symphony No. 6;

The dance influences culminate in the three middle movement interludes of an extended ethereal palindrome of "Nachtmusik I," the extended love song of "Nachtmusik II" and the middle, grotesque circus music waltz parody with trio in the three-movement interludes of "Song of Night" Symphony No. 7; the kaleidoscopic complex spectrum that is the scherzo between the Love Adagio and Finale of the Closing Scene of Goethe's "Faust" set by Mahler as Part 2 of the Symphony No. 8; the two internal movements of the shifting and extended laendler with trio and the Rondo-Burlesque with chorale anticipating the Finale in the "Farewell" Symphony No. 9; and the ultimate palindrome "Unfinished" Symphony No. 10, where Mahler again turns the symphony structure inside-out with a miniature treadmill dance as the "Purgatorio" middle (third) movement, flanked by two large scherzi and blocked with great andante-adagios.

Interestingly, Mahler took four years from 1896 to 1900 to complete the seminal Fourth Symphony, which had originated in 1892 alongside the Third Symphony, with its "Heavenly Life" soprano aria finale planned initially to close Symphony No. 3. Instead, he focused most of his energies, including his summer "composing" vacations, on securing the Vienna Court Opera directorship. Meanwhile, autobiographical and extra-musical elements and crucial Bach-like influences germinated in Mahler. These stimulated him to compose the purely orchestral middle three Symphonies Nos. 5-7 and the death-song cycles from contemporary poet Friedrich Ruckert, called *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the Death of Children) and the *Five Ruckert-Lieder*.

Polyphony and Death, Palindrome

The Bachian elements of polyphony and death came to dominate Mahler's music from 1900 to his own death on May 18, 1911. Counterpoint, experienced in all four movements of the Symphony No. 4, comes to the fore in the Rondo-Finale of his Symphony No. 5, with its chorale theme set against a quadruple fugue. Intricate and complex fugues are found in Part 1 of the Eighth Symphony, especially in the development march leading to the restatement of the opening theme, and in the Rondo-Buclesque of the Ninth Symphony. Like Bach in his last decade, Mahler turned his musical genius to increasingly elaborate, contrapuntal structures while both encountered growing criticism, including tendencies toward mannerism. At the same time, the theme of destiny and death infused Mahler as it had Bach.

A structural element particular and pervasive to both Mahler and Bach is the so-called "palindrome," mirror or pyramid form. As mentioned above, Mahler in his double scherzos in the second and third symphonies had expanded the tri-partite ABA song or trio-form to the five-fold structure of ABABA. In the Symphony No. 7 the "Nachtmusik I" is Mahler's longest scherzo, 15-18 minutes, in 11 parts with three contrasting tempo areas, A five times, B four times, and C twice: ABABCACBABA. Further, the entire symphony is a palindrome: extended allegro-rondo first and fifth movements and intimate pairs of Night music flanking the central scherzo. Mahler perfects this form in his Tenth Symphony with 24-minute opening and closing slow movements, two 12-minute scherzi, and the central, four-minute allegro moderato with momentary middle trio. In 1910, Mahler had completed his part-cell four-stave draft of this work and had begun the final orchestration and counterpoint, ceasing at almost midway point at the beginning of the central "Purgatorio" allegro moderato.

Bach's interest in palindrome form began with his first extant, reperformed vocal work, the pure Chorale Cantata BWV 4, "Christ lag in Todesbanden" (Christ Lies in Death's Dark Bondage) for Easter Sunday, 1708, in Muehlhausen. It is prominent as a structural device in his three cycles of sacred cantatas for the church year in Leipzig, 1723-26: opening chorus and closing tutti chorale with alternating arias and recitatives, often with a central aria or recitative that the musical sermon turns on, from the challenge to the solution. The sermon form itself is a rhetorical palindrome: *exordium* (introduction), *proposito* (dictum or key statement), central *tractatio* (development or investigation of the *proposito*), the *applicatio* (application), and *conclusio*.

Bach actually uses a series of palindrome symmetrical structures, built around the musically thematic (parodied) turbae or crowd choruses in his highly-dramatic 1724 *St. John Passion*. Here, scenes of Jesus' confrontations with antagonists in the garden, at his trials, and on the road to and actual crucifixion are structured in what Bach scholars call "chiastic" or "cross-like" forms. There is a central chorale or "Herzstücke" (heart-piece) such as a commentary aria or character arioso, surrounding the narrative of the Evangelist, the main characters, and the crowd that is interspersed with commentary arias.

The significance of the palindrome involves the structural device of symmetry, one of the three key elements in rhetoric, as developed by the Greeks, that also includes repetition and contrast that are significant, and intentional, especially as highly developed in the music of Bach and Mahler.

Mahler's Final Years

In the summer of 1907, three strokes of fate began to strike Mahler and he composed nothing: the death of his elder daughter Maria Anna due to scarlet fever, the prognosis of a fatal heart condition, and the triumph of his detractors making untenable his position at the Vienna Court Opera. In particular, the distraught Mahler is reported to have played music of Bach on the piano when he learned of Maria's death. Meanwhile, creatively, Mahler had completed his most ambitious work, the Eighth Symphony, a spiritual love song dedicated to his young wife, Alma Maria, and the family moved to New York where, as in

Vienna, he directed the leading Metropolitan Opera and soon after took over the New York Philharmonic. Now, Mahler's creative energies focused on the so-called "Farewell" trilogy of the Symphonies Nos. 9 and 10 (unfinished) and the Song-Symphony, "Song of the Earth."

Mahler's obsession with destiny and death is found throughout his works. Most prominent are the movements and passages with death marches or figurative parodies in the symphonies: the "Frere Jacques" parody in the First Symphony's scherzo; the gigantic "Todtenfeier" (Funeral Rite) march that opens the Second Symphony and originally was composed as a separate symphonic tone poem; the equally panoramic yet complex and allegorical opening movement (composed last) of the Third Symphony, "Pan Awakens and Summer Marches in," a death-reversal in which the inanimate elements of nature combine to nurture life and beauty; the "Friend Death" fiddler in the Fourth Symphony scherzo; the opening "Funeral March" and extension in the second movement of the "Giant" Fifth Symphony; and the Sixth Symphony's disintegrating, half-hour rondo finale with the three tragic hammer blows that represent the apocalypse of the opening *Allergo energico* first movement affirmative march of daily life.

There are no such funeral marches or passages in the Seventh and Eight symphonies, while there are only occasional march flourishes in the symphonic "Farewell" trilogy. However, there are various slow movements and passages, beginning with the "Adagietto" for strings and harp in the Fifth Symphony that have the dualistic qualities of both sorrow and loss, as well as the affirmation of love and life. As Mahler's slow movements progress in his later symphonies, there are elements of heightened poignancy, of a sometimes bitter-sweet nostalgia, of an empty or displaced fullness.

Found throughout his works, Bach's interest in death is legend. Apart from the biographical elements, his faith seemed generally unswerving and affirmative. Some of the most memorable passages are found in the scores of Bach's vocal works, which Mahler turned to in his summer composing cabin. They include the Cantata BWV 53, "Schlage doch, gewünschte Stunde" (Strike Thou, Wished-for Hours), a children's funeral cantata for alto solo, now attributed to Georg Melchior Hoffmann, and the quartet of cantatas for the 16th Sunday After Trinity: BWV 161, "Komm, du süße Todesstunde" (Come thou, sweet hour of death); BWV 95, "Christus, der ist meins Leben" (Christ, you are my life); BWV 8, "Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben" (Loving God, when will I die?); and BWV 27, "Wer wiss, wie nah mir mein Ende?" (Who knows how near is my end?).

Bach's cantatas contain three crucial elements: chorales of mourning and consolation, dance-style movements, and bells. For Bach, bells, like the dance, represent the dualistic nature of death, and are represented in the three Cantatas BWV 8/1,2, 95/5, and 161/4 for the 16th Sunday after Trinity with its Gospel of the raising of the dead son of the widow of Nain. Bach imitated bell sounds and used dance forms often to cushion the force of death. No actual bells are found in Bach's works although contemporary Johann Mattheson uses the glockenspiel in his 1718 Brockes Passion. Bach used various instruments of the orchestra to imitate bell sounds, particularly flutes and strings. In all, 13 examples have been found in 11 Bach cantatas, almost entirely solo arias. Besides the three cantatas cited above, the other examples are: BWV 27/3,5, 73/4, 83/1, 105/4, 114/5, 127/3, 133/4, and 198/4 (See Thomas Braatz, "Bach's Bells," Select Bibliography).

Bach's clearest representation of actual bells occurs in the alto Arioso (Movement No. 4) of the "Funeral Ode," Cantata BWV 198 [MUSIC C].

trü-ben See-len Schrek-ken durch ihr ge-schwung-nes Er-ze wek-ken und uns durch Mark und A - dern gehn.
 dread our souls grief stricken; thousand brazen tongues shall quicken the life blood in our ev'ry vein.

As Braatz observes: “This is perhaps the most remarkable example illustrating the manner and sequence according to which the bells begin tolling; the highest, smallest and easiest bells begin first with the middle-range bells entering later and the lowest, largest bells coming in last.”

Bach used bells more as a special characteristic of his music, a trademark or motif. Varied bells are used in Mahler’s symphonies, from the chimes in the “Resurrection Chorale,” the sleigh bells and glockenspiel in the Fourth Symphony, and the cowbells throughout the haunting “Tragic” Sixth Symphony as the last sound one hears high in the mountains. Mahler uses the representation of bells in the Third Symphony’s third scherzo (Movement No. 5), entitled “What the morning bells tell me,” where children’s voices sing the tolling ostinato of “bimm-bam-bimm-bamm” accompanying the Wunderhorn text, “Three angels were singing a sweet song” [MUSIC D] introducing the long Adagio finale, entitled “What Love (God) tell me.”

8

kleine Glocken
nicht zu stark!

Bläser
Bass
Horn
Trompete
Trommel

1. 2.
Flöte

1. 2.
3. 4.
Oboe

1.
nette in B.
2. 3.
nette in Es.
3. 4.
nette in B.
Fagotte.

Horn in F.

Kornett.
4 Barfak.

habe
ober mittlere
tiefe

lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck.

9

Kornett
Horn
Trompete
Trommel

1. 2.
3. 4.
Flöte

1. 2.
3. 4.
Oboe

1.
nette in B.
2. 3.
nette in Es.
3. 4.
nette in B.
Fagotte.

Horn in F.

Kornett.
4 Barfak.

habe
ober mittlere
tiefe

lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck.

man - ge drei En - gel ei - sen
sä - sen Ge - sang, mit Freu - den es sa - lig in dem Him - mel klang, an
Jo - ach - im Ir - th - lich such - te, weil
sa - ge drei En - gel ei - sen
sä - sen Ge - sang, mit Freu - den es sa - lig in dem Him - mel klang, an
Jo - ach - im Ir - th - lich such - te, weil
sa - ge drei En - gel ei - sen
sä - sen Ge - sang, mit Freu - den es sa - lig in dem Him - mel klang, an
Jo - ach - im Ir - th - lich such - te, weil

10

habe
ober mittlere
tiefe

von Sin - den, von Sin - den, von Sin - den
Pe - trus sei von Sin - den frei, er sei von Sün - den frei, er sei von Sün - den frei, er sei von Sün - den frei.

10

Frei
Und als der Herr Je - su - s zu Ti - sche sass, mit sei - nen zwölf Jü - gern das A - bend - mahl ass, die
Frei
Und als der Herr Je - su - s zu Ti - sche sass, mit sei - nen zwölf Jü - gern das A - bend - mahl ass, die
Frei
Und als der Herr Je - su - s zu Ti - sche sass, mit sei - nen zwölf Jü - gern das A - bend - mahl ass, die
Frei
Und als der Herr Je - su - s zu Ti - sche sass, mit sei - nen zwölf Jü - gern das A - bend - mahl ass, die

In the choral finale of Mahler's "Resurrection" Second Symphony, after the first two of the five verses of Friedrich Klopstock's "Resurrection Ode," Mahler added his own closing texts, including the line, "Sterben werd' ich, um zu Leben" (In dying shall I live)." Mahler had heard the ode sung to a hymn setting by a children's choir at conductor Hans von Buelow's funeral in Hamburg in March 1894. The Resurrection Ode motivated him to finish his symphony after completing the "Funeral Rite," (as well as the andante and the St. Anthony scherzo movements), says Viennese psychologist Theodore Reik (1888-1969) in *The Haunting Melody: Psychoanalytic Experiences in Life and Music* (New York: Grove 1953, pp. 219-355).

Lasting Influences

While examining Mahler's obsession with death and the significance of the three blows of fate, Reik found that there was another important chorale hymn for Mahler, the Latin *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, Part 1 of the Eighth Symphony. Reik, one of Sigmund Freud's earliest and most brilliant pupils and a life-long Mahler enthusiast, found connections involving the link of the Latin Pentecost hymn of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (spirit, wisdom, knowledge, counsel, strength, insight, and fear of the Lord; Isaiah 11:2) to the remainder of the Eighth Symphony.

The 9th Century Latin Hymn of Hrabanus Maurus (text and melody) for Pentecost (Vespers) was adapted by Martin Luther in 1524 in seven verses as "Komm Gott Schöpfer Heiliger Geist" (Come God Creator Holy Spirit) and set three times by Bach as a harmonized four-part vocal chorale, BWV 370; as a "Great Leipzig" Organ Chorale, BWV 667; and as an organ chorale prelude in the *Orgelbüchlein* (Little Organ Book), BWV 631.

A most remarkable example of a Bach influence is Mahler's use of a children's choir in the fourth verse of the Pentecost hymn, <*Accende lumen sensibus*> in the <*Veni Creator Spiritus*> of the Eighth Symphony, entering in the midst of the adult double chorus. It is reminiscent of the entrance of the boy's choir singing the chorale "O Lamm Gottes unschuldig" (O Lamb of God Unspotless) at measure 34 of the opening double chorus, "Komm ihr Töchter, helft mir klagen" (Come ye Daughters, Help Me Lament) [**MUSIC E**].

1 Chorus
Chori I LD

Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685-1750)

Edition Peters No. 4503

11404

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17 (Chorus I)

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30 Chorus I

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100

100 Sopranos in ripieno (Chori II)

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108

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110

111

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Mahler envisioned performing this Bach music with the adult choruses separated antiphonally and the boy's choir placed high above the orchestra in the organ loft, as is done in the <Veni Creator Spiritus> in the Musicverein performances in Vienna of the Eighth Symphony.

Part 2 of the Eighth Symphony is a setting of the Closing Scene of Goethe's Faust with its theme of redemption through the Eternal Feminine, love, and the creative spirit. Mahler dedicated his Eighth Symphony to his wife Alma and then composed his Song of the Earth and the Ninth Symphony in two successive summers.

Mahler began his 10th Symphony in the late summer of 1909, increasingly superstitious about the three blows of fate and the specter of composing a tenth symphony. While he had no composing block as he had experienced with the Resurrection Symphony and the beginning of his Eighth Symphony, Mahler discovered his wife's infidelity and in late August 1910 consulted with Freud on vacation in Leyden, the Netherlands. Freud, as he later told Reik, essentially concluded that Mahler had a "Holy Mary" (mother) complex. Mahler's sketch for the score of his 10th Symphony is filled with a myriad of phrases of love, regret, despair and premonition of his impending death expressed exclusively to his wife, Alma, especially in his partcell draft of the Finale. The work might be called Mahler's apotheosis of death.

The Finale of the Tenth Symphony, Mahler's last music, is in a quasi-sonata rondo form with the principal new music of the Adagio, following the opening series of hammer strikes on a muffled bass drum, reminiscent of the tragic hammer strokes of the "Tragic" Symphony. The slow exposition is some of Mahler's most searingly beautiful music, beginning with two cantilena themes: a flute solo, followed by a four-part contrapuntal chorale setting for strings. Eventually, the music disintegrates into the repeated drum strokes.

This is followed by an extended, fierce, driving Allegro Moderato development section in which Mahler quotes materials from the previous movements, particularly the Purgatorio central movements interwoven with fragments from the second extended scherzo fourth movement. Finally, the music moves to a shattering climax in which Mahler sounds the ninth chord initially found at the same place in the first movement Andante recapitulation, with a quote of the initial viola signature melody.

The third part of the movement is a long *Abgesang*. The Adagio cantilena themes return and are fully developed, leading to a climatic statement played by all the violins in unison. The music subsides and descends into an brief coda, dissolving into three upward octave intervals on the lowest instruments, reaching *ppp*, followed by the final violin interval upsurge a seventh with defiance yet resignation, supported by an extended, consonant cadential chord as the music fades out.

Mahler's marginal written quotes in the draft include: in the Purgatorio, "My God, why has thou forsaken me?" (Jesus' rhetorical Psalm 22 cry from the cross' at the end of his Passion) and "Thy Will be done" (Lord's Prayer); in the fourth movement Scherzo No. 2 subtitle, "The devil is dancing with me"; and at the end of Mahler's music, "To live for thee, to die for thee, my Almschi."

The two Purgatorio movement inscriptions "prove that Mahler understood Purgatory to be not only the 'purification' in the sense of the Catholic dogma of faith but above all a condition full of suffering and torture," says Constantin Floros in *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies* (translation Vernon Wicker) Portland OR: Amadeus, 1993: 309). Floros says the music originated in Mahler's confrontation with his wife and her lover, the architect Walter Gropius, in the summer of 1910 at Toblach.

Other Interests

Central to Bach's attitude towards death is his ability to synthesize the positive and negative aspects. All three Bach Passions close with monumental "rest in the grave" choruses of poignant texts and music: The Matthew Passion says, "Wir sitzen uns mit Traenen nieder" (We sit ourselves down in tears); John, "Ruht voll, ihr helige gebeine" (Rest well, ye holy limbs); and Mark, "Bei deinem Grab und Leichenstein, will ich mich stets, mein Jesu, weiden" (By thy rock grave and great tombstone, will I, myself, always tend). Meanwhile, all three choral movements are slow dances: Matthew is a sarabande, John a menuet, and Mark, a gigue. Thus Bach affirms that in death there is the sense of dance as vitality and life. It is possible

that Bach, an amateur theologian, was motivated by the line in Ecclesiastes (3:3): “He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy, the time for mourning and the time for dancing.” Perhaps Bach, and possibly Mahler, found and expressed the best of both times, of both worlds.

Mahler’s prominent use of the baroque ornaments of trills and turns became increasingly important to composers in the Late Romantic period, such as Rachmaninoff and Scriabin. Like Bach, Mahler’s use of the grace notes of trills and turns are part of the organic fabric of his music, expressing a human voice through instruments. The trills are employed throughout his music, particularly at climaxes in all his symphonies. Mahler selectively uses the four notes of the turn: in the oboe at the beginning of his love “Songs of a Wayfarer” and the opening of the final movement, “The Farewell,” in his song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* [MUSIC F],

61

6. Der Abschied
6. The Farewell

Grave

TRALTO

17 18

Im Takt
Steady
parlando, senza espressione
sempre p

The sun is
Die Son-ne

set-ting out be-yond the moun-tains and eve-ning
schei-det hin-ter dem Ge-bir-ge. In al-le

peace comes down in ev-ry val-ley
Tä-ler steigt der A-bend nie-der

and sha-dows leag-then, bring-ing cool re-
mit sei-nen Schat-ten, die voll Küh-lung

espr.

5 veloce

6

C. Minor

where Mahler also uses the recitative style as found in Schoenberg’s “Book of the Hanging Garden” and “Erwartung,” composed about the same time (1907-08). Mahler’s first use of the turn is found in the brass, especially the trumpet, and then the strings, in the Adagio coda of the Third Symphony, and finally to express varied emotional contexts prominently throughout his “Farewell” Ninth Symphony: caution, love, fulfillment, and release.

An element particular to Mahler, says Mitchell (*Ibid.*, 367) is the “developed concertante soloistic style of orchestration, very often approaching the threshold of the concerto.” As Mahler’s symphonies progress the concerto emphasis is balanced with passages of chamber music orchestration that also are shared in the contemporary music of Schoenberg, Webern, and Stravinsky. This style of composition can be compared to the baroque *concerto grosso* form, particularly as found in Bach’s Brandenburg Concerti, pitting solo instruments in a small group against a larger, usually traditional string ensemble.

Mahler’s interest in specific works of Bach was first explored in Mitchell’s *Gustav Mahler: The Wunderhorn Years* in 1975. In particular is Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*. Mahler remarked to Bauer-Lechner that he would like to perform this oratorio Passion “with two separate orchestras, one on the right, and one on the left” (quoted in Mitchell, 349) “In like manner there should be two separate choirs, as well as a third, which would actually be the congregation (the audience), who would have to be placed somewhere else. Then, there’s the boy’s choir, which I would put high up in the organ loft, so that their voices would seem to come from heaven. You should hear the effect when question and answer are divided like this [in the dramatic dialogues], instead of being all mixed up together as is always the case nowadays.”

Mahler used one particular trademark also found in Bach’s three Passions, where the turbae choruses represent the crowds of onlookers in the drama, usually Jesus’ antagonists, especially noted for their vehemence in the *St. John Passion*. In the Third Symphony, following the great opening theme of “Pan awakens,” at the second march complex, as the celli and double basses sound the summer marching theme at cue 44, all the upper wind instruments play a mocking dance involving a group of almost grotesque descending trills punctuated with rising grace notes that in the manuscript are labeled “Das Gesindel” or “the rabble,” or “Die Grob” or “the mob” [MUSIC G].

2nd March Complex

43 Immer dasselbe Tempo. (Marsch.) Nicht eilen.

Musical score for measures 43-44. The top two staves are in bass clef with a key signature of three flats. Measure 43 starts with a piano (*p*) dynamic. Measure 44 features a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The music consists of rhythmic patterns with some triplets in measure 44.

44

Musical score for measures 44-45. This section contains multiple staves with complex rhythmic patterns, including many sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include fortissimo (*ff*), diminuendo (*dim.*), and mezzo-forte (*mf*). There are several "zu 2" markings indicating a second ending or repeat. A vocal instruction "Schalltr. in die Höhe!" is present in measure 45. The score includes various clefs and a key signature of three flats.

"They certainly include most of the ironically grimacing and sneering creatures that had made up the cortege of the Huntsman's Funeral in the First Symphony," says Peter Franklin in his monograph of *Mahler Symphony No. 3* (Cambridge: 1990, 87).

Here is Naegel's summary of the connections between Bach and Mahler:

“It is striking that there should thus emerge a complementarity across a philosophical gulf between the central position of music in the Lutheran view – as resonant theology, and its central position in Schopenhauer’s – as resonant philosophy; between Bach’s text-explicative music and Mahler’s word derived, word seeking, and word transcending music; between an art that derives its structure from a perceived world order and an art that develops its structures to recreate the world anew from within; between an art that understands itself as coming from God and one that understands itself as going to God; between an art that penetrates deeper and deeper into its techniques and thereby strengthens and summarizes them in a grand “summa” of its Renaissance and Baroque inheritance, and one that goes further and further out of its Classical and Romantic inheritance ending in the dissolution of its techniques; and, finally between an art that breaks *off* at the point where Bach, in *The Art of Fugue*, introduces the crucifix-related musical-rhetorical figure that spells in tones and letters of his own name, and the art that breaks *down* with Mahler’s heartrending, scrawled invocation of his wife’s name in the margins of the tenth symphony.”

Mahler’s Bach Performances, Arrangements

Mahler did present the closing chorus, “Wir sitzen uns,” in Hamburg in 1896, the same year that he made an Easter gift of the scores of the *St. Matthew* and *St. John Passions*, as well as the *Christmas Oratorio*, to Bruno Walter, his young rehearsal pianist and vocal coach at the Hamburg Opera. Says Walter, “the possession of which gives me great joy” (quoted in Mitchell 378f). Conductor Walter, who led the first performances of Mahler’s Ninth Symphony and *Das Lied von der Erde*, and other Mahler “disciples,” conductors Willem Mengelberg and Otto Klemperer, would continue the tradition of presenting Mahler’s works and Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion* into the second half of the 20th Century. Their recordings of Bach’s monumental Passion are still available.

Walter directed the abridged version of the Matthew Passion, annually on Good Fridays as Bavarian Music Director in Munich (1913-22) and in an uncut performance with the New York Philharmonic in the 1950s. (See “Notes on (performing) Bach’s St. Matthew Passion,” in Walter’s *Of music and Music Making* (New York: Norton, 1961, 170-190).

Bach cantatas Mahler probably performed include Nos. 48, “Ich elender Mensch,” and 78, “Jesu, der du meine Selle,” as well as Cantatas 19 and 65, all in Peters performing editions scores. The motet, “Jesu meine Freude” may have been performed and the eight-voice Motet No. 1, “Singet dem Herr ein neues Lied,” is documented on a program with the first performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 5 in Vienna with the Philharmonic on 7 December 1905. Part of Mahler’s concert repertory in Vienna and New York were the Bach Clavier Concerto No.1 in D Minor and the Violin Concerto No. 2 in E Major

Mahler’s direct involvement with Bach is documented in his arrangement of the Orchestral Suites (with progressive harmony and concertante keyboard) that he directed from the harpsichord with the New York Philharmonic c.1910. Mahler received a \$500 fee from the G. Schirmer publishers. It is listed as “Suite for string orchestra, harpsichord & organ - re-orchestration and re-arrangement into four movements of six original movements from the Orchestral Suites of J.S. Bach, using:

- Overture from Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor, BWV 1067
- Rondeau & Badinerie from Orchestral Suite No. 2 in B minor, BWV 1067
- Air on a G string from Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068
- Gavottes Nos. 1 & 2 from Orchestral Suite No. 3 in D major, BWV 1068

Instrumentation: 1200/0300/timp/pf/str; Duration: 18 min; [G Schirmer Inc]”

For a BCW discography of Bach-Mahler Orchestral Suite see: <http://bach-cantatas.com/Arran/OT-Mahler-Rec-Orchestra.htm>.

The Mahler reworking is cited in a New York Times 2001 article by George B. Stauffer during the New York Philharmonic revival of the Mahler published arrangement, which was followed by numerous recordings (“Rewriting Bach, as Bach Rewrote Others,” *New York Times*, Feb. 25, 2001). Stauffer writes at length about Bach’s keyboard transcriptions of concerti of Vivaldi, Telemann, and Marcello as well as numerous composers and arrangers who have adapted and arranged Bach’s music since, including hundreds of compositions on the “BACH” motif. In Leipzig, Bach presented Passion music of his contemporaries Reinhard Keiser, Georg Philipp Telemann, Georg Frideric Handel, and Gottfried Heinrich Stoezel, as well as two church cantata cycles of Stoezel. Beginning in Leipzig, Mahler completed Carl Maria von Weber’s opera, “Die Drei Pintos,” and reorchestrated the symphonies of Beethoven and Schumann for performance, to clarify textures and lines.

Impact and Criticism

In both the cases of Bach and Mahler, 50 years had passed before their reputations were secured, Bach as part of the making of the modern German nation at the beginning of the 19th Century, and Mahler as an icon of the Age of Anxiety and the Cold War, beginning in 1960 at the centennial of his birth when Leonard Bernstein led the New York Philharmonic in performances of all his symphonies.

Both composers, initially recognized in their lifetimes as talented young performers, faced significant and pointed criticism, Bach in the so-called “Scheibe Controversy” of 1737, and Mahler particularly during a tour conducting his Third Symphony in 1904 in the Rhineland.

Says Johann Adolph Scheibe, composer, writer, and former Bach student: “The great man would be the admiration of whole nations if he had more amenity, if he did not take away the natural element in his pieces by giving them a turgid and confused style, and if he did not darken their beauty by an excess of art” (The New Bach Reader, ed. and rev. Hans T. David & Arthur Mendel, rev. and enlarged Christoph Wolff; Norton: New York, 1998: No. 343, p. 338).

Newspaper critics described Mahler’s Third Symphony in negative terms as “the stupefying and disconcerting first movement, banality, a lack of melodic invention and originality linked to eclecticism and an absence of any sense of ‘inner necessity’ about the music,” as well as “‘bizarre and trivial elements’, atrocious cacophony, ‘incomprehensible platitudes’ and rudely garish sounds which added to chaos” (described by Peter Franklin, *Ibid.*, 27).

This perhaps is a criticism of Bach’s and Mahler’s music as an expression of “mannerism,” a term developed in the second half of the 20th century by various musicologists. In essence, it involves consistent exaggeration and distortion of fundamental or progressive musical elements, particularly in transitional periods of musical styles. It is described in the “ars subtilior” rhythmic complexity movement of the late 14th century chanson transition from Medieval to Renaissance music; in the development of the motet and madrigal using “motivicity” in the Franco Flemish composers of the 16th century; in the harmonic audacity of Gesualdo and the musical rhetoric and new style of Claudio Monteverdi transitioning to the Baroque period c. 1600; and in the Mannheim school with surging dynamics, rhythm and rising scales of the pre-Classical-Romantic era c.1770. (William Hoffman, “Mannerism in Music,” paper for Mus 513, “Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Music,” University of New Mexico, 2010).

Interestingly, music history in one sense has come full circle today. New York Philharmonic conductor Alan Gilbert is programming four Bach concerts in the coming season four weekly series of concerts in a renewal of the connection between Bach and Mahler, “The Bach Variations: A Philharmonic Festival,” March 6 to April 6, 2013: conductor Masaaki Suzuki and Bach Collegium Japan, Bach’s Motet No. 1, “Sing to the Lord a New Song,” and “Magnificat” and Mendelssohn’s “Christus” and Magnificat”; Gilbert

conducts Bach's *Mass in B Minor*; Bach's Violin Concerti Nos. 1 and 2, and the Orchestral Suite No. 3; and Bach Keyboard Concerti in F and D Major.

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