



Mahler Centenary Conference 'Gustav Mahler: Contemporary of the Past?'

7 July 2011 - 9 July 2011

Conference Report



The papers

30 papers were delivered by scholars from eleven countries in sessions addressing the following topic areas:

- Culture and Interpretation
- Nostalgia, Myth and the Fourth Symphony
- Aesthetic Theory
- Love, Death and Modernity
- Mahler and the Visual
- Analytical Approaches Performance
- Early to mid-20th-century issues
- Re-creation and Reception
- Histories
- Musical Invocations
- Deflecting Time
- The Eighth Symphony

The keynote address was given by Professor Julian Johnson (Royal Holloway, London): 'Time, History, and Modernity in the Music of Gustav Mahler'

A roundtable discussion was led by five leading UK composers who have been influenced by Mahler's music: Anthony Payne, David Matthews, Edward Gregson, Stephen Goss and Emily Howard.

The conference programme, containing summaries of each paper, can be downloaded [here](#).

A short video with segments from the conference can be viewed [here](#).

Event themes

The purpose of the conference was to offer opportunities for re-evaluating Mahler's position within the musical, cultural and multi-disciplinary contexts of the 21st century.

The overriding theme of 'contemporary of the past' invited consideration and reappraisal of paradoxical questions of past, present and future in Mahler's creative practice and in contemporary audiences' engagement with it.

Consequently, cutting across the topic areas listed above were themes of:

- Reception history, mythologizing, methods of historical understanding, and current relevance
- The composer's attitude to the music of his own past and to inherited structural models/processes
- Other composers' and conductors' creative responses to Mahler's music
- Mahler's engagement with other art forms such as literature, philosophy, theatre, visual arts, and film; and with aesthetic/cultural categories such as decadence, eroticism, allegory, Secession, and nostalgia.

The following presentation slides illustrate some of these ideas and themes:

- [Morten Solvik](#) (PDF 1.6 MB), "'What Love Tells Me": Art and Eros in Mahler's World'
- [Matthieu Schneider](#) (PDF 1.3 MB), 'Pedester ist der usikstoff, sublim der Vortrag': Mahler's Scherzos as Impulses for the Evolution of usical Language'
- [Timothy Freeze](#) (PDF 786 KB), 'The Topicality of Nostalgia: Multiplicity of Reference in the Posthorn Solos of Mahler's Third'
- [Alessandro Cecchi](#) (PDF 16.9 MB), 'Mahler, Contemporary of Bruckner: Bruckner's Ninth and Mahler's First Symphony'

These themes were supported by an art exhibition by [Caroline Tate](#) and a Mahler-inspired sound installation by Matthew Sansom in the Lewis Elton Gallery, as well as five concerts given by Maureen Galea and Michelle Castelletti (Hatchlands, Clandon), the Tetra Guitar Quartet (including the world premiere of Stephen Goss's Mahler Song arrangements), [Uri Caine](#), Emilie Capulet and the Endymion Ensemble. There was also an exhibition relating to Mahler's composing environments, by [Keith Clarke](#).

Outcomes

A selection of 15-16 expanded papers is in the process of being assembled for publication in a volume entitled 'Perspectives on Gustav Mahler 2'. The proposal will be submitted to Ashgate with whom I have been in discussions for some time.

Acknowledgements

The conference was supported financially by:

- The British Academy
- The Institute of Advanced Studies, University of Surrey
- The Music & Letters Trust
- The Royal Musical Association
- The Institute of Musical Research, University of London
- The Austrian Cultural Forum, London
- The Department of Music & Sound Recording, University of Surrey

The student helpers from the Department of Music & Sound Recording did an excellent and highly professional job:

Peter Bryant

Julian Fagan-King (who provided crucial technical support in the lecture room throughout the conference)

Laurence Willis

Hera Yoon

Julie Barham also undertook translation work, and provided delicious Marillenknödeln (apricot dumplings), Mahler's favourite pudding, as well as some specially commissioned conference ceramics – the 'Bitter-sweet' range.

Mirela Domic from IAS was invaluable in her administrative support throughout the preparations of the conference, and also extremely active during the conference in making sure everything ran smoothly, and in generating a warm social environment for delegates.

Feedback from delegates

One of the most enjoyable (and professionally profitable) conferences in which I have participated in over 40 years of attendances.

I wanted to thank you again for organizing and hosting such a spectacular conference. That everything was so precisely and beautifully orchestrated made for

a memorable and enormously enriching few days. I returned to the US this week newly inspired by the remarkable work of this truly wonderful group of colleagues. It was a splendid convocation, much different from any other such conference I've attended.

I really enjoyed listening to such interesting papers, meeting or re-meeting colleagues, and I also benefited from new ideas in the discussions. The conference was perfectly organised.

Organiser: [Dr Jeremy Barham](#), Department of Music and Sound Recording,
University of Surrey