

Valuable find for editors: Mahler's "Second Symphony"

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When in 2000 Mahler enthusiast and conductor (he exclusively conducts the Second Symphony) Gilbert Kaplan met the editor of the Wunderhornlieder, Renate Stark-Voit, neither imagined that they would embark on a long journey together, spending years exploring the rutted landscape of manuscripts and prints of Mahler's Second that were left behind by the composer. A fascinating report of their travels.

The starting point of our work was two of Mahler's scores that were in the ownership of Universal Edition and – as it soon emerged – were neither available nor even known to the late editor of the symphony in the Complete Works, Erwin Ratz. These two conductor's scores contain a wealth of entries in Mahler's handwriting and it seems that each score was alternately sent to the correction department of the publishing house on several occasions. On the cover of one of them, Mahler specifically wrote the title "Corrigirt und Einzig Richtig" (Corrected and Solely Accurate) with the dates 1907 and 1910. This gives the impression that a new edition based upon this score would fully reflect Mahler's ideas. But the matter is more complicated than that: when it comes to Mahler, things are anything but straightforward!

We were looking at the end of the long history of the Second in Mahler's lifetime, and we needed to start at the beginning: the first sketches of what was to become his Second Symphony reach as far back as the year 1888. After an interruption, which can be described as a creative block, Mahler subsequently wrote all five movements of his Second between 1893 and the end of 1894. Numerous sketches and drafts of the individual movements have survived, and the autograph fair copy which formerly belonged to the conductor and friend of Mahler, Willem Mengelberg, has been made available to researchers in both original and facsimile form.

The fact that the composer, who was still relatively unknown at the time, understandably wished to perform his symphony, led to the preparation of two copyist scores in the year 1895 for two different occasions: one copy for

the performance of the first three movements in March, and another copy for the five-movement première in December. The copyist employed by Mahler in Hamburg at the time – Ferdinand Weidig, who was a trombone player in the orchestra of the Stadttheater – was evidently a highly fastidious person, a good musician and loyal “servant of his master”. For instance, it is said that he was required to continuously enter changes in his copies (and probably the individual parts from the performances, which no longer exist) during the rehearsals in which Mahler first heard the sound of his music. However, his “loyalty to the work” also proved to be slightly overenthusiastic in some places. At one point in the Scherzo, Mahler entirely consciously allowed parallel fifths and added a playful comment in his fair copy using a separately marked footnote: “These are forbidden! I know! (Note for adjudicators!)”; Weidig copied this cynical note absolutely precisely in both of his scores, with identical wording and illustration, and it would have been printed if the composer had not crossed it out in the second copy just in time □

This is a rare amusing find among the abundance of partially contradictory changes and corrections that have troubled editors since the very first handwritten sources: What is right? What is performance-related, what should be set down for the future? And so it continued over the years.

*It was not until 1908 that Mahler received improved copies
of the engraved score.*

Chor VI.

Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n mußt du
mein Herz in einem See!
Was du geschlagen
Zu Gott wird es dich tragen!

Solo VII.
und Chor

Mit Flügeln, die ich mir erzungen
werd' ich entschweben,
Zum Licht, zu dem Bein ang'gedrungen
Ja sterben werd' ich, um zu leben!

Chor,

VIII

Aufersteh'n ja auferstehn wird du
^{Zu Gott} ^{ein} ^{zu} ^{Reich}
mein ~~Herz~~ ^{Hand} nach ~~dem~~ ^{dem} ~~Reich~~
Unsterblich's Leben
Woh, der dich liebt, dir geben.

Steinbach, Mittwoch,

13 Juni 1894

Draft by Gustav Mahler, dated 13 June 1894 in Steinbach am Attersee, where he also wrote his Symphony No. 3

The first edition of the score was published subsequent to the orchestra (chorus and solo) parts, which were evidently initially engraved in batches in Leipzig in accordance with the first handwritten drafts, with the missing instruments added at a later date – when Mahler was already in Vienna. The first edition is itself not completely identical to these parts because it is based on an engraver's copy that is for the most part, but not entirely, based on Weidig's second copy (the handwritten engraver's markings do not correspond to the breaks between the printed pages and systems, for example). As soon as Mahler was given the score, he continued to add further changes. He gained valuable experience in five performances between 1896 and 1903; by this time, however, fellow conductors (such as Franz Schalk and Bruno Walter) had also been presented with scores, and the corrections that were applicable at the time were subsequently entered in these scores by copyists at Mahler's request. The short-lived nature of these revisions can only be recognised when they are compared with his own copies, which were our

starting point. Mahler arranged for both these and other corrections to be entered – unfortunately again only in part! – in his final (used in 1907 and 1910) performance material: a set of parts that was thrown together, in which not even the individual string desks are identical in appearance! This leads us to ask: what can be considered as reliable by an editor?

In addition, Universal Edition printed study scores of Mahler's first four symphonies in 1906, based on engraver's plates which included the changes that had been sent to the correction department prior to that date. In the case of the Second, this includes the two copies that are not identical and were corrected alternately. Mahler only received large-format copies of the score for the first time in 1908 with the changes included in the engraver's copy; he himself probably never used the score in this form. In this score, he entered – as far as possible – the improvements and revisions from his "Solely Accurate" copy while disregarding the differences between the first and revised printing stages of the scores. However, he continued to make corrections even after that, until April 1910 for his final performance of the symphony in Paris.

Only a comparison of all these thoroughly mixed up sources, which creates a vivid impression of the composer's lifelong preoccupation with this "perennial" symphony, enabled the editors to gradually approach a musically acceptable solution to numerous problematic areas. The Critical Report, which also includes controversial decisions, has been published in the accompanying text volume (UE 33 882b) to the best of the editors' knowledge based on historical deliberations and discussions that focus on the problematic nature of editing and performing this work. The extent to which we can fulfil Mahler's wishes in this new edition will be revealed in the many performances which will hopefully be given by dedicated musicians of the present day and future.



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