

TRACK
INFORMATION

PERSONAL
STATEMENT

LINER NOTES

LYRICS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Mahler Symphony No. 3
Czech Philharmonic
Semyon Bychkov

CATRIONA MORISON
PRAGUE PHILHARMONIC CHOIR
PUERI GAUDENTES

Album cover photography:

Detail of Rudolfinum interior

© Pavel Barták

Booklet cover photography:

Semyon Bychkov

© Marco Borggreve

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 3 in D Minor (1895-1896)

Disc 1

Part One

1 I. Kräftig. Entschieden 35.22

Disc 2

Part Two

1	II. Tempo di minuetto. Sehr mässig	10. 02
2	III. Comodo. Scherzando. Ohne Hast	17. 03
3	IV. Sehr langsam. Misterioso. Durchaus leise	9. 45
4	V. Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck	4. 29
5	VI. Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfundener	25.20
Total playing time Disc 2:		66. 43

Catriona Morison, mezzo-soprano (Disc 2, tracks 3 & 4)

Prague Philharmonic Choir (Disc 2, track 4)

Lukáš Vasilek, choirmaster

Pueri gaudentes (Disc 2, track 4)

Libor Sládek & Jan Kyjovský, choirmasters

Czech Philharmonic

Jan Mráček, concertmaster

Jan Perný, trombone solo (Disc 1, track 1)

Walter Hofbauer, post horn solo (Disc 2, track 2)

conducted by **Semyon Bychkov**



Expressing the polyphony of life

Semyon Bychkov on Mahler's symphonies

Leningrad 1960s, Capella Hall, mid-morning. Silence. A miracle of sound is born in the magical acoustic of this venerable concert hall. A young boy studying at the Glinka Choir School, which sits adjacent to the Capella, comes several times a day to listen to the Philharmonic orchestra rehearsals during the 10-minute breaks between his classes. He hides unseen behind the stage and finds himself transported into an unknown world of incandescent beauty from which he will never want to escape. He forgets to return to classes and, walking in the city later that day, sees a poster announcing a performance of the Third Symphony of Gustav Mahler. What he had just heard were the opening sounds of the symphony's Finale. Before he knew anything about this music or its creator, he felt Mahler saying 'What Love Tells Me'.

On this day my need to live with Mahler's music was born.

Discovering Mahler's music is akin to discovering life itself. Experiencing it, is to be drawn into his world and values. What emerges from his music, his letters and, the testimonies of those who knew him is the duality of this man. Being a creator and interpreter all at once, he invents the sounds which re-create the world of nature and humans.

To create he must rise above the world in order to see its complexity. Paradoxically, the conflicts co-exist and intertwine, resolve and enter into new confrontations. There can be no end to them and therefore no beginning.

To re-create he must live inside the world and bear the brunt of its contradictions.

4

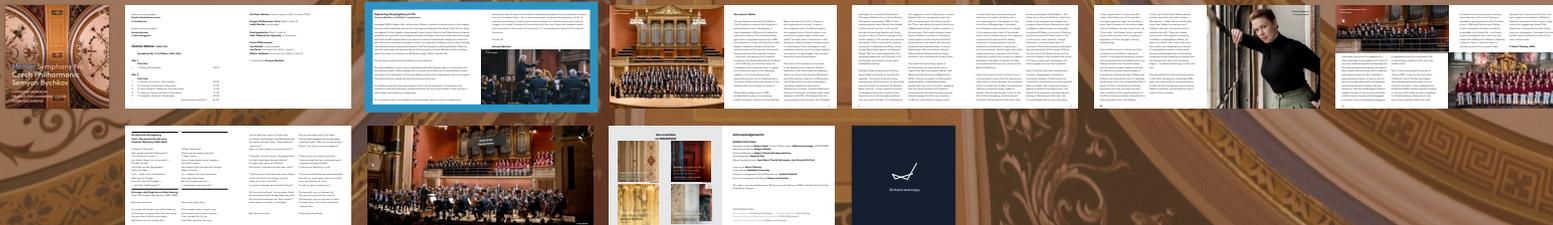
He had less than 51 years to realize the fundamental questions of our existence and even less time to answer them. Yet, it was long enough to express the polyphony of life: its nobility and banality, its reality and otherworldliness, its childlike naivety and inherent tragedy. He wouldn't provide all the answers but, the most important question about the immortality of the world and our place in it, he answered at the end of his Second Symphony.

He was 34.

Semyon Bychkov



© Petr Kadlec





Czech Philharmonic
© Petra Hajská

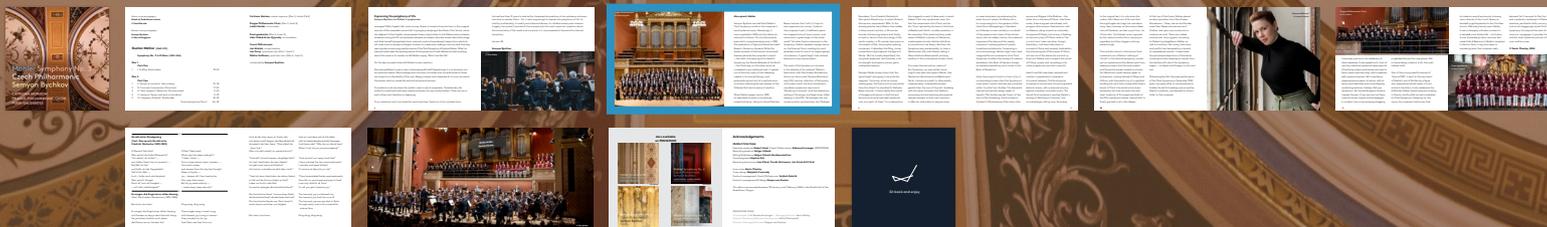
Also sprach Mahler

Semyon Bychkov has said that Mahler's Third Symphony contains the composer's least hysterical music. Revealingly, it was completed in 1896, shortly before he returned to Vienna. The city had recently given birth to psychoanalysis and, in 1895, the publication of Sigmund Freud and Josef Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*. While the darker recesses of the human mind would likewise pervade the composer's output – the Sixth, the opening of his Seventh Symphony, the Rondo-Burleske of the Ninth – the Third may, on the other hand, be considered a pre-hysterical work. It speaks not of the hurly-burly of the Habsburg capital in its most glittering, most pessimistic period, but of a spiritual vision of nature, reflecting the epic beauty of the Attersee that was its place of creation.

When Mahler began work in 1893, he described his plans in surprisingly unspiritual terms, telling his friend Nathalie

Bauer-Lechner that 'with it, I hope to earn applause and money'. A joke on the composer's part, it befitted a piece he imagined to be of 'pure humour and merriment, a great laugh at the whole world!' Yet while there is merriment in the Symphony, Mahler adopted strange tactics on the financial front, creating his most extended score for one of his largest groups of musicians. A 'great laugh' had, instead, become a major proclamation.

The scale of the Symphony is mirrored in the diversity of its material. Mahler's fascination with *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano's early 19th-century collection of folk poetry, continued in both the third movement's (wordless) symphonic response to 'Ablösung im Sommer' and the celebratory setting of 'Es sungen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang' in the fifth. Yet between the two comes another world entirely: the 'Midnight



Roundelay' from Friedrich Nietzsche's *Also sprach Zarathustra*, to which Richard Strauss also responded in 1896. To this already peculiar brew, Mahler then added a folksy minuet and trio, a 25-minute chorale of disarming beauty and, finally, at least in terms of the chronology of the work's creation, a 35-minute tone poem on the subject of Pan. Forming the opening movement, it describes the fiving, cloven-hooved faun's fight against the figure of Winter. 'But he is easily dispatched', the composer explained, 'and Summer, in all his strength and superior power, gains undisputed mastery'.

Perhaps Mahler always knew that this 'great laugh' was going to be quite the opposite. 'You know, as far as money-making goes, the Third won't do any better than the others!' he chuckled to Nathalie Bauer-Lechner. 'It soars above that world of struggle and sorrow in the First and Second, and could have been produced only as a result of these.' It is a description

that suggests a work of disavowal, in which Mahler's first two symphonies, even the first five movements of his Third, are like the 'Töne' rejected by the bass in the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth – another yardstick, in the same key. That would certainly make sense of Mahler's inclusion of Nietzsche, a philosopher he later told his wife Alma to remove from her library. But then the Symphony was, paradoxically, to have a Nietzschean title, with Mahler calling it *Meine fröhliche Wissenschaft*, echoing another of the controversial thinker's texts.

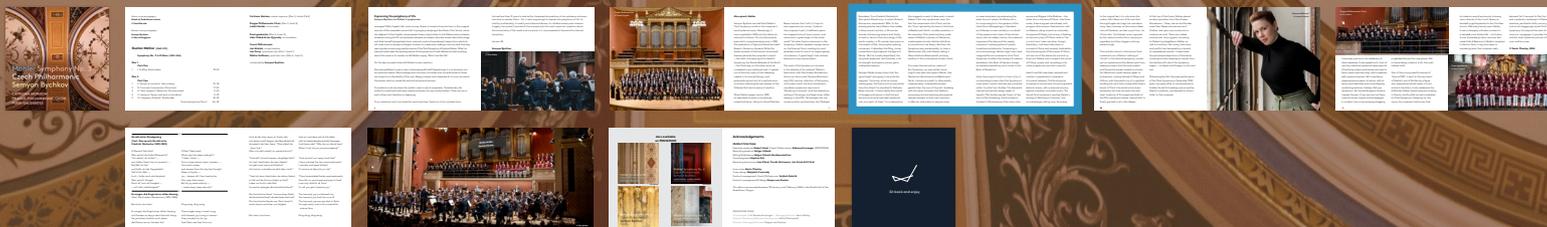
To answer the summatory nature of this Symphony, an even better name might have been *Also sprach Mahler*. Like Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* and Beethoven's Ninth, it shows us a path to otherworldly understanding: a Gesamtkunstwerk, greater than the sum of its parts. Speaking with the same virtuosity that Mahler's composing idol and seeming philosophical nemesis brought to their own creations, it offers an alternative to religious piety

or meek submission by embracing the sheer force of nature. As Mahler sat in his composing hut in the gardens of the Hotel Zum Höllengebirge in Steinbach am Attersee, he was certainly in no doubt of the passions and chaos of the natural world, with its sudden storms, the iridescent turquoise of the lake and the nearby mountains' towering pillars of quartz, limestone and dolomite. Composing in such surroundings, Mahler might even have imagined the six movements of his Third Symphony to reflect the six days of creation described in the Book of Genesis, though he achieved something much closer to the Book of Revelation.

Given the scope of what is in front of us, it is astonishing to learn that the Symphony's most salient motivic features are contained within its initial horn fanfare. The elemental intervals and primal energy speak of Haydn's 'Die Vorstellung des Chaos' at the start of *Die Schöpfung*, the first steps in Schubert's *Winterreise* and the storm that

announces Wagner's *Die Walküre* – the latter two in the same D Minor. Like those works, there are great risks ahead, with progress often elusive. Marches brim with confidence, riding towards an ostensibly triumphant D Major, but victory is fleeting, as the wintry key of D Minor returns. This is not to be a linear narrative, though, thankfully, it will eventually reach a moment of thaw and renewal, heralded by the whinnying call of Pan's pipes. D Minor will rise out of the silence for one last icy blast, but Mahler soon trumpets the arrival of F Major proper and, according to his initial programme, summer's warmth.

Health and life have been restored and creation is presented in a sequence of musical tableaux. The floral second movement's minuet and trio pits a graceful diatonic dance, with occasional swoons, against a puckish chromatic scurry. The faunal third movement, quoting Mahler's setting of 'Ablösung im Sommer', has a contrastingly chilling tone. According



to the original text, it is only when the cuckoo falls lifeless out of his nest that the nightingale can begin her melodious song. Here, however, as the cuckoo fades into soft fanfares, we hear a post horn, 'as if from afar'. Its ethereal voice is ignored by the natural world at first, carrying on regardless, but then triggers a stirring breakthrough.

The contralto soloist in the human third movement, as in Mahler's setting of 'Urlicht' in the Second Symphony, sounds just as mysterious as the distant post horn, seeking answers that the birds, beasts and flowers have been unable to provide. Yet Nietzsche's words likewise speak of aimlessness, rocking between F Major and A Minor, with the painful cry of a nightbird recalling the cock that crowed after Peter's denial of Christ. His salvation has been assured by the time we reach the trish-trash simplicity of the angels and bells of the fifth movement, before 'eternal bliss' is finally granted to all in the Adagio.

At the top of the Finale, Mahler placed another quotation from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*: 'Vater, sieh an die Wunden mein! Kein Wesen lass verloren sein!' (Father, look upon my wounds; let no creature be lost!). There are, indeed, wounds and 'burning pain', according to Mahler's protégé Bruno Walter, as well as contrition. But slowly, the chaos and conflict are tempered by a chorale of unparalleled warmth. It sublimates the picturesque depictions of the earlier movements while drawing its melody from the fanfare with which the Symphony began — its Alpha and Omega, its first and last.

Witnessing the first Viennese performance of the Third Symphony in December 1904, given two years after its world premiere in Krefeld, Arnold Schoenberg was wowed by Mahler's ambition, and decided to write a letter to the composer:

Catriona Morison
© Jeremy Knowles





Prague Philharmonic Choir
© Petr Kadlec

I have seen your soul in its nakedness, its utter nakedness. It was spread out in front of me, like a wild and mysterious landscape, full of terrifying chasms and ravines, and next to them, serene and charming, sunlit meadows, idyllic places of repose. I felt it was like an awesome phenomenon of nature, with its terrors and calamities and its transfiguring comforting rainbows. I believe I felt your Symphony. I felt the battle against illusions; I sensed the pain of one who has lost them; I saw the forces of good and evil engaged in combat; I saw a human being struggling

in agitated torment for inner peace; I felt a human being, a drama, truth, the most ruthless truth!

One of the most powerful missives of 'Vienna 1900', it went to the very heart of Mahler's world. Written by a figure who experienced similar levels of scorn and anti-Semitism, it also addressed the difficulties Mahler faced living and working in Vienna, shortly after he had completed his Third Symphony. Preparing for the move, the composer had known that

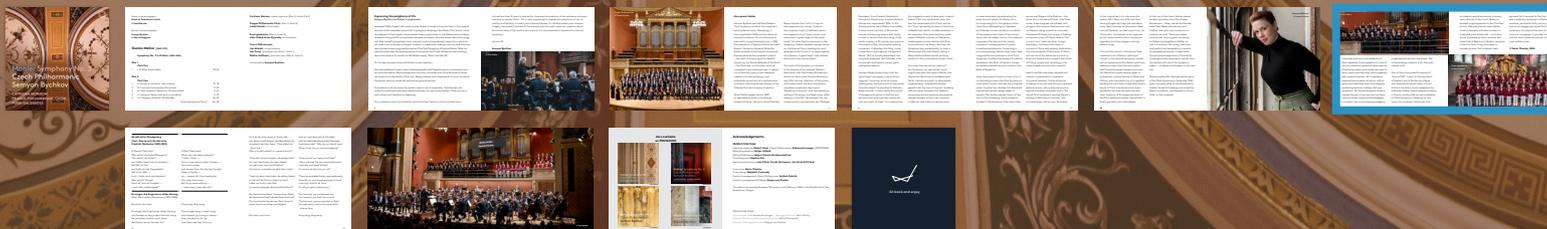
his Judaism would be a barrier to being music director of the Court Opera, so decided to get baptised into the Christian church. Effectively forced upon Mahler, it was a strangely orthodox moment in a decidedly unorthodox life — an illusion, to use Schoenberg's term, and one that made little difference to Mahler's reception in Vienna. Now, it may also leave us wondering what the composer really

believed. Yet if we want to find the 'wild and mysterious landscape' of Mahler's heretical, pantheistic faith, we only need look at his staggeringly broad Third Symphony. Far beyond the walls of any church or synagogue, it provides the most truthful, least hysterical portrait of the man and his music.

© Gavin Plumley, 2024



Pueri gaudentes
© Petr Chodura



3

Zarathustras Rundgesang
(Text: Also sprach Zarathustra,
Friedrich Nietzsche, 1883-1885)

O Mensch! Gib Acht!
Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht?
"Ich schlief, ich schlief —,
aus tiefem Traum bin ich erwacht: —
Die Welt ist tief,
und tiefer als der Tag gedacht.
Tief ist ihr Weh —,
Lust — tiefer noch als Herzeleid.
Weh spricht: Vergeh!
Doch all' Lust will Ewigkeit —,
— will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!"

O Man! Take heed!
What says the deep midnight?
"I slept, I slept —,
from a deep dream have I awoken: —
the world is deep,
and deeper than the day has thought.
Deep is its pain —,
joy — deeper still than heartache.
Pain says: Pass away!
But all joy seeks eternity —,
— seeks deep, deep eternity!"

4

Es sungen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang
(Text: Des Knaben Wunderhorn, 1805-1808)

Bim bam, bim bam.

Es sungen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang,
mit Freuden es selig in dem Himmel klang.
Sie jauchzten fröhlich auch dabei:
daß Petrus sei von Sünden frei!

Ding dong, ding dong.

Three angels sang a sweet song,
with blessed joy it rang in heaven.
They shouted too for joy
that Peter was free from sin!

Und als der Herr Jesus zu Tische saß,
mit seinen zwölf Jüngern das Abendmahl aß,
da sprach der Herr Jesus: "Was stehst du
denn hier?
Wenn ich dich anseh', so weinst du mir!"

"Und sollt' ich nicht weinen, du gütiger Gott?
Ich hab' übertreten die zehn Gebot!
Ich gehe und weine ja bitterlich!
Ach komm und erbarme dich über mich!"

"Hast du denn übertreten die zehen Gebot,
so fall auf die Knie und bete zu Gott!
Liebe nur Gott in alle Zeit!
So wirst du erlangen die himmlische Freud'."

Die himmlische Freud' ist eine selige Stadt,
die himmlische Freud', die kein Ende mehr hat!
Die himmlische Freude war Petro bereit't,
durch Jesum und allen zur Seligkeit.

Bim bam, bim bam.

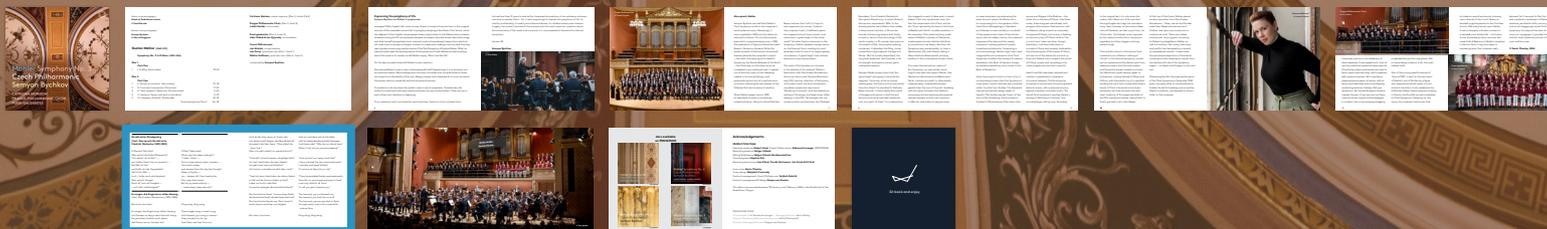
And as Lord Jesus sat at the table
with his twelve disciples and ate the supper,
Lord Jesus said: "Why do you stand here?
When I look at you, you are weeping!"

"And should I not weep, kind God?
I have violated the ten commandments!
I wander and weep bitterly!
O come and take pity on me!"

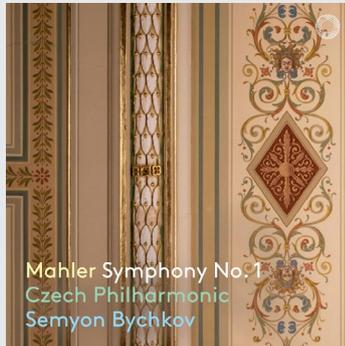
"If you have violated the ten commandments,
then fall on your knees and pray to God!
Love only God for all time!
So will you gain heavenly joy."

The heavenly joy is a blessed city,
the heavenly joy that has no end!
The heavenly joy was granted to Peter
through Jesus, and to all mankind for
eternal bliss.

Ding dong, ding dong.



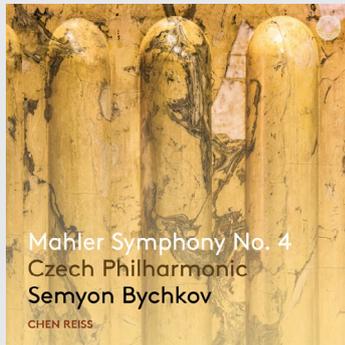
Also available
on PENTATONE



PTC5187043



PTC5186992



PTC5186972



PTC5187021

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producers **Robert Hanč** (Czech Philharmonic) & **Renaud Loranger** (PENTATONE)
 Recording producer **Holger Urbach**
 Editing & Mastering **Holger Urbach Musikproduktion**
 Sound engineer **Stephan Reh**
 Recording technicians **Ivan Zbíral, Čeněk Kotzmann, Jan Krček & Vít Král**

Liner notes **Gavin Plumley**

Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady**

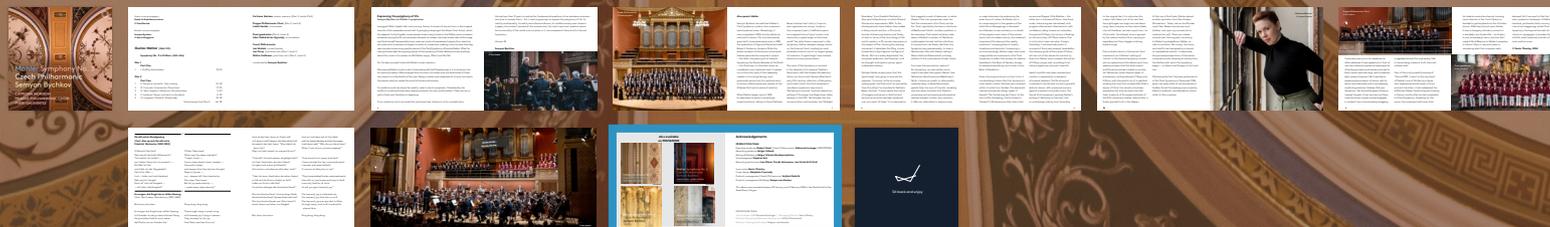
Product management Czech Philharmonic **Vojtěch Šafařík**

Product management & Design **Kasper van Kooten**

This album was recorded between 30 January and 3 February 2024 in the Dvořák Hall of the Rudolfinum, Prague.

PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Sean Hickey**
 Director Marketing & Business Development **Silvia Pietrosanti**
 Director Catalogue & Product **Kasper van Kooten**





Sit back and enjoy

