

## **Mahler's Eighth Symphony**

### **A Lifetime's Triumph**

by Dennis Wu

The premiere performance of Gustav Mahler's Eighth Symphony on September 12, 1910 in Munich was most arguably the greatest triumph of his entire life. The ten-year ex-general manager of Vienna's court opera, the iron-fisted maestro of intense music-making, the impresario of crazy dedication to work, and the oft-caricatured conductor had returned from New York for the summer to conduct this premiere to great expectation. The public knew this to be a work of gigantic dimension.

The Vienna tenure was a reforming one: at age 37 Mahler brought invigorating performances that promised to reignite the ailing house, making it a glorious institute of German operas. In his first year as general director of Hofoper, extensive public attention translated into much-improved ticket sales. He radically reshaped the orchestra's personnel, fired popular yet incompetent soloists, mounted unknown yet exciting works, and held festive performances of musically-convincing and dramatically-pleasing productions all aligned with his perfectionist taste for everything big and small. Gustav Mahler had become a name of might and vitality in the *fin-de-siècle* Vienna.

His origin as a Jew had drawn Mahler torrents of attacks amidst the anti-Semitic smog, and before appointed at Hofoper, he converted to Catholicism. "The fact that I am Jewish prevents my being taken on in any court theatre. Neither Vienna nor Berlin, nor Dresden, nor Munich is open to me. The same wind is now blowing everywhere," Mahler wrote to his friend in 1896, when he would soon decide a conversion might tactically be of great advantage. It certainly was, as we see the proximity of dates between his conversion and his appointment at Vienna. Nevertheless Mahler's Jewish origin was often a matter of sarcasm and *ad personam* attacks by the anti-Semitic press. Mahler distanced himself from these attacks, particularly out of diplomatic concerns. What we cannot comment on with accuracy is his complex feeling toward faith.

### **A Hymn of Faith and Love**

In fact, after completing the colossal Eighth Symphony in an explosively creative summer of 1906 — which began in a half-hour first part of Pentecostal Latin hymn *Veni creator spiritus* — Mahler had not been actively thinking of its première. Partly it is the complexity of the work that prevented him. It calls for two mixed-voice choirs, seven soloists of diverse drama (eight at the second part, which is an hour long), an unusually large orchestra that calls for quintuple winds, an offstage brass band and a battery of harps and keyboards and pipe organ. It is also partly because of his self-doubt of this work, being so contrary to what he had written in his previous symphonies. "It's funny. The work always makes the same, typically powerful impression. It would be absurd if my most important work happened to be the easiest to understand," wrote Mahler to his wife Alma.

Powerful and true. Easiest to understand, perhaps not. In spite of that, Mahler consistently recognised the inherent greatness and depth of this work, as Mahler-biographer Henry-Louis de la Grange says, "A hymn of faith and love, a song of praise dedicated to man's high endeavour on earth and his search for truth." The symphony also possesses a philosophical dimension that is key to Mahler's worldview. In a lengthy reply to Alma's question about Goethe, he discussed what he thought about the last part of *Faust* :—

Everything is merely an image for something whose form can only be an imperfect expression . . . What is transitory can of course be described, but that which we feel and sense, but to which we will never attain . . . the everlasting quality which is always present behind all phenomena, is indescribable. That which attracts us with mystical power, which every creature, and perhaps even the stones, feels with absolute certainty to be the very centre of its being, which Goethe at this point—again in the form of an image—calls the eternal feminine—namely, that which is at rest, the goal—in contrast to the eternal longing, striving, and movement towards this goal—that is, the eternal masculine!—You are quite right to describe it as the power of love.

The limitation of rationality, the contrast between eternal masculine, primal force and desire, and the eternal feminine; the incarnation of peace and supremacy. These theses become central, not only to Part Two of the Eighth Symphony, which sets the final scene of *Faust* to music, but also to a key understanding of the link between the two parts of highly contrasting text and style.

After the stormy departure from Hofoper in 1907, Mahler increasingly pondered the possible performance of the Eighth Symphony. Although being a transformative power on the opera podium, reception of Mahler the composer was not so welcoming. Some of his earlier works puzzled and overwhelmed his audience, but things started to change at the turn of the century. The premiere of a Mahler symphony became increasingly an eagerly awaited event.

The first of two Munich performances of the Eighth Symphony was attended by more than three thousand people. Among them, some of the most influential: writers Thomas Mann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Stefan Zweig; composers Richard Strauss, Alexander Zemlinsky, Richard Wagner's son Siegfried, Anton Webern, Camille Saint-Saëns and Paul Dukas; notable press from Germany, France and even America. The two evenings in Munich's new Musikfesthalle, designed by architect Theodor Fischer, had sold out. Emil Gutmann the impresario, billed this concert *Symphony of a Thousand*, and this strategy worked tremendously, albeit Mahler violently objected, feeling embarrassed about the title. Additionally, wide publishing of symphony details, its analysis, and the progress of rehearsals all contributed to high anticipation.

### **A Timeless Hymn of Praise: Veni Creator Spiritus**

The people witnessed a symphony created with an explosive impulse, and it opened with equal explosiveness. **Part One** of the Eighth Symphony begins with a unison call of "**Veni, veni creator spiritus**" (Come creator spirit) in E-flat major on chorus and pipe organ, followed by a fanfare of brass that brings solemnity to the call. The falling fourth of the first "veni", and then a leap of seventh to the next "veni" punctuates the whole symphony as a unifying motive. Mahler stressed on numerous occasions the link between the ideas of two vastly differing texts between the two parts of the symphony. The "**veni**" motive provides a symbolic link in the musical layer.

After passages featuring solos and shady orchestral interludes, the first part arrives at another energetic explosion in "**Accende lumen sensibus**" (Luminate our senses). This is "where the bridge rises up to take us over to the last scene of *Faust*. This moment is the keystone of the whole work," the composer explained to the musicians in rehearsal as captured by Anton Webern. The falling fourth motive from the first "accende" is instantly noticeable. The gradual rise of the second "accende" however, unfolds its link to eternal love and redemption during the course of the symphony. The powerful music is also joined by the children's chorus — at the Munich premiere there were 350 of them — where Mahler insisted to be heard only in this fiery exposition. In fact, he wished the children's chorus to be prominently heard. "Must enter like a knife through butter." This is a formidable task, as the children's chorus is also singing

along with (and sometimes against) two mixed-voice choruses, which later engage in a double fugue.

The fiery “**Accende lumen sensibus**” expands in increasing intensity and passion, and culminates in a powerful recapitulation of “Veni creator spiritus”. Up to this moment, Part One of the symphony reveals itself to be in sonata form. However, to simply state the first part is in sonata form would ignore the centrality of the “accende”, which itself is not developing but firmly established in E major. John Williamson, in the essay on this symphony in the *The Mahler Companion*, suggests this procedure “which circles obstinately round certain fixed points” a method to make this part “a hymn of praise, static and timeless.” Near the half-hour Part One displays a powerful universe of sound that makes this “an elevated communal rite.” Webern, in his initial response to the symphony, says “I’m still completely bowled over by it.”

### **Love and Redemption: Final Scene of *Faust***

**Part Two** of the symphony sets the text of the final scene from Goethe’s *Faust*. Contrary to a more through-composed Part One this hour-long part divides into distinct episodes, as in Goethe’s text. After an opening orchestral prelude setting a wilderness scene, a finely divided male chorus sings and echoes the sounds from the deep, “**Waldung, sie schwankt heran**” (Forest sways). Two monks, by baritone solo and bass solo, sing the desire of profound love and its violent nature, first by Pater Ecstaticus from high “**Ewiger Wonnebrand**” (Eternal passion of delight) and then by Pater Profundus, “**Wie Felsenabgrund**” (As the rock precipice). The “Accende” theme heard prominently as the trumpet adds a passion which burns in these highly expressive arias, a call for love that transcends the human senses.

After a brief orchestral interlude, the music brings a more elevated mood in welcoming the children’s chorus as the choir of blessed boys, “**Hände verschlinget**” (Clasp hands joyfully). This begins the “scherzo” of Part Two as analysis would suggest. Flutes dance, strings bounce on high notes, brass calls in delights heralding Faust’s imminent salvation. The younger angels sung by women’s chorus, sing love’s role in *Faust’s* redemption, “**Jene Rosen aus den Händen**” (Those roses from the hands). The more mature angels sung by the altos and tenors of the choir, present a darker side of this love, as it may not be a pure one with human’s mortality “**Uns bleibt ein Erdenrest**” (To us remains an earthly residue). The music links up to **Part One** as a direct recapitulation from “**Infirma nostri corporis**” (With Thy strength which never decays, confirm our mortal frame).

Rejoicing is restored with the younger angels singing again and the welcoming of Doctor Marianus, tenor solo, in a soul-lifting entrance celebrating his transformed life, “**Hier is die Aussicht frei**” (In the freest prospect and elevated spirit). After a brief period of flowing music with the women’s and children’s chorus, the tenor solo sings in invocation to Mater Gloriosa, Virgin Mary, “**Höchste Herrscherin der Welt**” (Most exalted mistress of the world), again in E major with allusion to the “Accende” theme of Part One.

The aria of Doctor Marianus, the transformed Faust, turns from passion to tenderness, giving way to a slow orchestra interlude. A static chord of harmonium and harp in arpeggio under slow moving violins — sometimes dubbed “love theme” — prepares the men’s chorus in singing for Mater Gloriosa, “**Dir, der Unberührbaren**” (To Thee, virgin-unassailable). Three repented women sing about love and redemption: Magna Peccatrix, by the first soprano solo, is the sinful woman who anointed Christ’s feet, “**Bei der Liebe**” (By the love); Mulier Samaritana, by the first alto solo, is the Samaritan woman at the well, “**Bei der Bronn**” (By the well); Maria Aegyptiaca, by the second alto solo, is Saint Mary the Egyptian who repented after venerating the relic of the cross in Jerusalem, “**Bei der Hochgeweihten**” (By the Holy place). The three penitent women sing a canonical trio and prepares Una Poenitentium, the soul of Gretchen, *Faust’s* lover whom he failed to save. Sung by a second soprano solo, Una Poenitentium is

accompanied by a mandolin playing the love theme, “**Neige, neige, du Ohnegleiche**” (Incline, thou unparalleled). The blessed boys join in and welcome Faust’s soul which has finally reached higher spheres.

After a brief and quiet “Accende” calls are heard in horn and muted trumpets over a fabric of harmonium and tremolos of celestas and harps. Mater Gloriosa, a third soprano solo, sings “**Komm, Komm**” (Come, come) from atop, allowing Gretchen to lead the soul of Faust into heaven. Faust gives his exalted thanks to Virgin Mary, “**Blicket auf zum Retterblick**” (Look up to the redeeming gaze).

The music quietens to prepare the final hymn, *chorus mysticus*, singing the final eight verses which Mahler undoubtedly considered the crux of the symphony and discussed such extensively with Alma. What one sees around the world is all but transitory, eternal longing and striving, however, brings eternity, “**Alles vergänglichliche, ist nur ein Gleichnis**” (All things transitory are but parable). The final verses of *Faust* demand readings of many kinds, but Mahler in this masterwork penned one of the deepest and exalted finales that ever fitted a work of this depth and length. The work ended in a wall of triumphant sound in E-flat major, with echoes of the “**Veni**” motive from the offstage brass band high above. Mahler, in this most momentous work, “was permitted to release to the world through the voices of a mighty host of singers this leitmotif of his greatly agitated soul, that he was able to pronounce the message of life and faith while the seeds were already in his heart, was a thrill beyond anything he had ever experienced,” as Bruno Walter, Mahler’s protégé, noted after the premiere. The premiere ended in triumph and extended ovation of “**delirius enthusiasm**”, as noted in the press.

Following the creative burst of this immense symphony, Mahler was torn by three disastrous events, and all occurred in 1907: his departure from the Hofoper; the death of his daughter Maria; discovery of his heart’s valvular defect which prevented him partaking in vigorous exercise and work. He never recovered from this *annus terribilis*.

The premiere of the Eighth Symphony was a final recognition of Gustav Mahler, opera conductor and master symphonist of his time, and offered a last stand to see him radiantly shine on a European stage. At the young age of 50, Mahler died on May 18, 1911, leaving his Ninth Symphony, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and the unfinished Tenth Symphony in the drawer unperformed.

## 馬勒第八交響曲 輝煌的讚歌

胡銘堯

馬勒第八交響曲於 1910 年 9 月 12 日在慕尼黑首演。這場首演，毫無疑問是馬勒人生最輝煌的一刻。他之前在維也納宮廷劇院擔任了十年的音樂總監，也是一位聞名、完美主義、工作狂的指揮。那時，他離開紐約回到歐洲大陸過夏天，並且指揮首演這首大作，公眾都熱切期待。

馬勒十年的維也納任期，令宮廷劇院重添光彩。他上任時只有 37 歲，立即為歌劇帶來耳目一新的歌劇製作。他一上任，已經受公眾注目，亦因着他具能量的演繹，歌劇院的票房立時改進過來。之後，他大膽地改革，改變樂團任命、將受歡迎但其實不太有能力的歌手辭退、上演不太熟悉但刺激的歌劇、提高演奏質素和戲劇張力，這些一切都在他對大小事情的掌控之內。馬勒成為維也納的能量與生命力。

但是，身為一位猶太人，他卻經常遭受攻擊。他在上任宮廷劇院總監之前，改信了天主教。在1896年，馬勒在信中向友人透露：「我身為猶太人，令我不能在任何宮廷劇院擔當職位。不論是維也納、柏林、德累斯頓還是慕尼黑，都給我吃閉門羹。」不久之後，他決定改信天主教，認為這會對他的事業有幫助。維也納宮廷劇院的任命，果然在不久之後成事。雖然，他終於克服了制度上的阻撓，但反猶太的報章，卻將會一直攻擊他。馬勒一直避免直接回應這些人身攻擊，畢竟身為歌劇院總監，需以大局着想。而我們亦因此無法得知，馬勒對信仰與宗教的真正看法。

## 信念與愛的詩歌

事實上，馬勒在1906年以短短幾星期完成了這首以五句節詩歌《來，創造的靈》為首部份的第八交響曲之後，一直沒想過要把它首演。究其原因，或許因為這作品的陣容太過巨大：它需要兩個混聲合唱團、七位難度要求相當高的獨唱家（第二部份還要加入第八位）、非常大的五管制管弦樂團、一個在舞台以外的銅管樂小組，還有一大堆豎琴、鍵盤樂器和管風琴。另一部份原因，是他對此作品有點懷疑。這首交響曲，實在與之前的有很大的差異。他曾對妻子艾瑪寫道：「真有趣：這首作品就是只有一個一貫典型的強大印象。我的最重要作品，居然是最容易理解的作品，真是奇怪。」

最強大，正確；最容易理解，或許不是。雖然如此，馬勒從來對這樂曲的偉大與深度沒有懷疑。馬勒的傳記作者德拉格朗形容，這是一首「對信念與愛的詩歌，是一首獻與人在地上偉大情操與探求真理的讚歌。」這交響曲也蘊含着馬勒對世界的看法。在一封回答艾瑪關於歌德的問題的信件中，馬勒詳細地闡釋了他對《浮士德》結尾部份的看法：

一切都只是表象，某種事物的形相不完美的表達……任何短暫的事物當然可以被描述，但我們所感受與感覺的、我們永不能達致的……一切現象背後的不朽本質，這是不可言喻的。那以神秘力量吸引我們之物，每一生物、甚至石頭、在其存在之中心毫無疑問地感受的，亦是歌德在此（以表象的形式）稱為永恆女性之物，換言之，作為靜止的終極目的之物。與之相反，是永恆的嚮往、奮鬥與朝此目的之運動，就是永恆之雄性！妳說得好，這是愛之力量。

理性的限制、對永恆渴求的男性與超脫的女性，這些都成為交響曲的核心，不單只限於第八交響曲以歌德《浮士德》為歌詞的第二部份，而是對整首交響曲、兩段完全不同的歌詞的連結。

1907年，馬勒離開了維也納宮廷劇院以後，開始盤算第八交響曲的首演。雖然，他是個歌劇的改革家，但作為作曲家的馬勒，卻因着作品艱深而並不太受歡迎。雖然，在二十世紀初的幾年，情況慢慢有點轉變，馬勒交響曲開始被不同樂團演奏，而交響曲的首演，開始成為眾人期待的盛事。

第八交響曲的首演，一連兩晚在慕尼黑舉行。首場演出有超過三千人出席，其中包括最具歐洲最具影響力的人：作家托瑪斯曼、霍夫曼斯塔爾與茨威格；作曲家理察·史特勞斯、策姆琳斯基、華格納的長子齊格飛、魏本、聖桑與杜卡；還有德國、法國甚至是美國的主要記者。兩晚音樂會六千多張門票，早在開演前售罄。主辦者顧特曼為樂曲起題「千人交響曲」，果然見效，不過馬勒強烈地反對此標題，甚至為之覺得尷尬。門票銷售理想的另一原因，是它的細節、分析、綵排狀況等等，都被報章鉅細無遺地報道。簡而言之，慕尼黑正在熱切期待這場首演。

## 超越時間的讚美詩：「來創造的靈」

馬勒爆發的靈感，以非常短的時間完成的第八交響曲，開頭同樣具爆炸性。**第一部份**以「來，來創造的靈」(**Veni, veni creator spiritus**) 是一個降 E 大調的齊唱號召，合唱團加上管風琴的開場，接上是莊嚴的銅管樂合奏。第一個「veni」的下行四度音程，與之後的「veni」上行的跳動，將會在整首交響曲不斷出現。馬勒在不同場合中強調樂曲縱然兩部份完全不同，但有大量意念令它們連結在一起。這個「Veni」主題將音樂上連繫整首交響曲。

經過幾段獨唱與幽暗的管弦樂段落，第一部份的交響曲迎來了第二個爆炸性的段落：「求光照我三司五官」(**Accende lumen sensibus**)。作曲家魏本在觀看綵排時，紀錄了馬勒如此對樂團解釋這一段：「就是引領我們到《浮士德》最後一場的橋樑。這是整首作品最重要的地方。」第一個「accende」的下行四度，相當明顯，而第二個「accende」逐步拾級而上的動機，將會與愛和救贖扯上關係。這時，兒童合唱團亦會加入演出。首演時，兒童合唱團有 350 名成員，而馬勒特別指明他們的聲音而相當突出，「就像刀切過牛油一樣。」合唱團在成人合唱團（後來是一個雙重賦格）與樂團間突圍，毫不容易。

這段「求光照」逐漸激昂，直至「來創造的靈」主題重現。此時，樂曲似乎要展現這是以傳統奏鳴曲式寫成。但是，若把第一部份說成是以奏鳴曲式為結構，則忽略了以 E 大調為主的中段的重要性。在《The Mahler Companion》一書撰文剖析第八交響曲的音樂學家韋廉遜形容，第一部份圍繞着幾個固定的調性，是要令這部份成為一首「靜止、超越時間的讚美詩」。在歷時差不多半小時的第一部份完結時，音樂展現創造的偉大，像要觀眾一起參與一個莊嚴典禮。魏本形容他聽完之後，「仍然被它徹底擊倒。」

## 愛與救贖：《浮士德》最終場

交響曲的**第二部份**，以歌德的《浮士德》最終一場為曲詞。與較為連貫的第一部份不同，差不多一個小時長的第二部份，以截然不同的段落組成，與《浮士德》的文本相對應。音樂開首的管弦樂段落，營造了曠野的氣氛。男聲合唱團此起彼落（**Waldung, sie schwankt heran**「森林，應風披靡」）。兩位僧人，分別以男中音獨唱與男低音獨唱飾演，唱出對愛的渴望與愛暴烈的一面，先出場的是狂喜教父（**Ewiger Wonnebrand**「永恆的歡喜之火」），後來的是男低音獨唱演唱的沉思教父（**Wie Felsenabgrund**「彷彿在我腳下的岩壁」）。此時第一部份的「Accende」主題在小號響起，令激動的詠歎調更顯熱熾。

一段簡短的管弦樂間奏後，音樂的氣氛變得輕快。升天童子由童聲合唱團唱出（**Hände verschlinget**「手跟手拉住」）。這成為了第二部份的諧謔曲段：長笛輕盈地奏響，弦樂在高音處跳躍，銅管樂唱着快樂的調子，這些都預示着浮士德將得救贖。女聲合唱團扮演未成熟的眾天使，唱出在救贖中愛的重要（**Jene Rosen aus den Händen**「授與我們玫瑰」）。成熟的眾天使則唱出較為幽暗的旋律，塵世的愛有其較暗啞的一面（**Uns bleibt ein Erdenrest**「搬運塵世的遺蛻」）。這段音樂，將第一部份一段「**Infirma nostri corporis**」重現，意思是「以祢不滅力量，堅我朽壞身軀。」

不過，快樂將在不久後重臨，當年輕的天使歡迎男高音主唱的崇拜瑪利亞的博士，精神抖擻地高歌讚頌他的新生命（**Hier is die Aussicht frei**「在這邊眺望很開闊」）。經過與眾天使飛翔般的合唱後，男高音以第一部份相當重要 E 大調，唱出對榮光聖母的讚歌（**Höchste Herrscherin der Welt**「統治世界的最高女王」）。

崇拜瑪利亞的博士，得救的浮士德高歌，由激動的詠歎調慢慢轉變成溫柔，帶領音樂進慢的部份。一個靜止的簧風琴，加上豎琴稀疏的撥弦，伴隨着小提琴慢慢奏出稱為「愛的主題」的旋律。男聲合唱團繼續崇拜瑪利亞的博士的讚歌，讚頌榮光聖母（**Dir, der Unberührbaren**「你不可碰觸」）。三位悔眾的女人歌唱愛與救贖：罪孽深重的女人，即第一女高音獨唱，是以淚水膏耶穌腳的婦人（**Bei der Liebe**「那種深愛」）；第一女低音獨唱是井旁的撒瑪利亞婦人（**Bei der Bronn**「那口井泉」）；埃及的瑪利亞，即第二女低音獨唱，是在耶路撒路向十架遺物朝聖後恢罪的聖女（**Bei der Hochgeweihten**「那塊聖地」）。三人輪唱，預備另一名悔罪女人出場，她就是浮士德不能救贖的愛人格蕾辛的靈魂。格蕾辛由第二女高音獨唱演唱，她唱出「愛的主題」，並且由曼陀琳琴伴奏（**Neige, neige, du Ohnegleiche**「請你，請你，無與倫比者」）。眾人與升天童子一起，迎接浮士德的靈魂到達天堂。

一輪寧靜的「**Accende**」旋律在圓號與小號中響起，加上簧風琴、鐘琴及豎琴編織了一段優美的前奏，就是準備榮光聖母出場（**Komm, Komm**「來」）。榮光聖母由第三位女高音獨唱唱出，簡單的兩句，引領格蕾辛與浮士德升天。浮士德最後向聖母俯伏敬拜（**Blicket auf zum Retterblick**「請來仰望救主的眼睛」）。

音樂慢慢變得相當寧靜，預備結束的一段「神秘的合唱」。全本《浮士德》最後八句，無疑是馬勒認為這首交響曲的核心，他亦在書信中與艾瑪詳細闡述他的想法。在世上所見一切都是無常虛幻，惟有渴望與追求帶來永恆（**Alles vergängliche, ist nur ein Gleichnis**「一切無常者，不過是處幻」）。《浮士德》的結尾，可以有不同的解讀，但馬勒將這段由神秘至高亢的合唱，將第八交響曲這首巨著，帶來震撼的尾聲。全曲在震耳欲聾的降 E 大調和弦中完結，舞台外的銅管樂小組，高奏着「**Veni**」的主題。馬勒透過這首大作，「透過這麼多把聲音，向世界唱出他那焦慮靈魂一直想說、潛藏心裏生命與信念的訊息。」他的徒弟華爾特如此說：「這是他從沒有試過的振奮。」首演過後，歡呼聲久久不退，報章形容觀眾「歡喜若狂」。

馬勒以驚人的爆炸力，短時間內完成這首巨著。完成後一年，即 1907 年，馬勒經歷了三件對他打擊甚重的事：辭任維也納宮廷劇院、女兒瑪利亞逝世、他發現自己心臟毛病而需減少工作。經歷這災難一年，從此直走下坡。第八交響曲的首演，固然是他作為指揮、作曲家的一生，最輝煌的經驗，但這首演也見證了他在歐洲舞台最後的演出。首演後不足一年，他將在 1911 年 5 月 18 日黯然辭世，享年只有 50 歲。

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