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■Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

■Symphony No. 9 D Major (81')

Gustav Mahler composed his Symphony No. 9 in D Major near to his death between 1909 and 1910 (Mahler died on May 18, 1911). The piece is indeed his last completed symphonic work, which premiered posthumously on June 26, 1912, with Bruno Walter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. The score calls for piccolo, four flutes, four oboes (the fourth doubling English horn), E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, four bassoons (the fourth doubling contrabassoon), four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani (two players), cymbals, bass drum, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, glockenspiel, chimes, two harps, and strings.

At the time of his death, Mahler was working on another symphony, a work frequently referred to as Mahler's Tenth. This new composition was more than a gathering of sketchy ideas. He had nearly finished with the first movement, and the structural design of the whole piece was clearly laid out. Mahler began writing the Tenth immediately after the completion of the Ninth. As a result, the former is related to the latter—the Tenth cites thematic materials of the Ninth. These two symphonies actually represent a new stage in the composer's symphonic creation. When Mahler wrote his First Symphony back in 1888, he did not deviate from traditional symphonies, making the piece purely instrumental. For his Symphonies Nos. 2, 3, and 4, however, he decided to include vocal parts to elaborate the concept first adopted by Beethoven. Mahler then returned to the idea of writing pure-instrumental symphonies when he composed his Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh (he did not, however, forget to include strong programmatic intentions in these pieces). He then once again incorporated vocal parts in his monumental Eighth Symphony, a composition that is often called the “Symphony of a Thousand.” Around that time, he also wrote another large composition that calls for orchestra and voices. This was *Das Lied von der Erde* (*The Song of the Earth*), a piece

consisting of six songs, each for a solo voice and orchestra. The work is not by any means in accordance with a typical symphonic framework but was described as a symphony when it was published for the first time. Mahler's Symphony No. 9 has no direct link to the Eighth Symphony or *Das Lied von der Erde*; the piece is after all pure instrumental. At the same time, however, it can be regarded as a piece that is somewhat tied to both the Eighth and *Das Lied von der Erde* because the latter is cited by the unfinished Tenth Symphony, a work that also utilizes thematic materials of Symphony No. 9.

The structure of Mahler's Symphony No. 9 does not follow the standard scheme of traditional symphonies. Its first movement, marked *Andante comodo*, proceeds slowly and quietly. Towards the end, there are several climactic moments, where the full sound of orchestra is heard, but much of the movement remains somber. The second movement is springy and light, comprising German country dances called *Ländler*. After the vigorous third movement, Mahler places another slow movement as a finale. It is written in an extremely subtle and peaceful manner. At the conclusion, music fades out, as its final measures are marked “*Langsam und ppp bis zum Schluss (Slow and ppp until the end).*”

[Akira Ishii]