



Mahler

Symphony No.8

Sir Adrian Boult

mp **LIVE**

Gustav Mahler 1860–1911

1 Audience 0'30

Part I

2 Veni, creator spiritus 4'45

3 Infirma nostri corporis 5'37

4 Accende lumen sensibus 4'25

5 Veni, creator spiritus (reprise) 2'43

6 Gloria patri 2'51

Part II – Final scene from Goethe's Faust Part 2

7 Introduction 9'01

8 Chorus of anchorites 4'20

9 Rapturous, endless fire (Pater ecstaticus) 1'55

10 Mighty boulders far below me (Pater profundus) 4'26

11 [chorus] 6'15

12 The Queen of Heav'n (Doctor Marianus and chorus) 4'13

13 [The Mater Gloriosa soars into view] (Chorus) 3'04

14 By the love before him giving (Magna Peccatrix) 1'10

15 By the well in pastures lying (Mulier Samaritana) 1'49

16 (Maria Aegyptiaca) 3'36

17 (Una poenitentium) 5'06

18 Come! Come! (Mater gloriosa and choir) 1'16

19 Look on high! (Doctor Marianus and choir) 5'33

20 Chorus mysticus 5'55

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Magna peccatrix
Una Poenitentium
Mater gloriosa
Mulier Samaritana
Maria Aegyptiaca
Doctor Marianus
Pater ecstaticus
Pater profundus s

Elena Danieli
Dora van Doorn
Emelie Hooke
Mary Jarred
Gladys Ripley
William Herbert
George Pizzey
Harold Williams



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BBC Choral Society chorus master Lesley Woodgate
Luton Choral Society chorus master Arthur E Davies
Wallington Choral Society chorus master Robert Noble
Watford and District Philharmonic Society
chorus master Leslie Regan
Lambeth Schools' Music Association Boys' Choir
chorus master Francis Steptoe
Boys of Marylebone Grammar School chorus master D.H. Hedges

BBC Symphony Orchestra

Sir Adrian Boult

A Henry Wood Concert Society Concert
at the Royal Albert Hall, London, 10 February 1948
Music Preserved Collection

Suns and planets revolving: Mahler at the Royal Albert Hall

Colin Anderson

You now have access to a slice of musical history. On 10 February 1948 was given only the second performance in the UK of Gustav's Mahler's Eighth Symphony, the so-called Symphony of a Thousand, which had first been heard in Munich on 12 September 1910 with the composer conducting and then leading a second performance on the following day. The work's sobriquet was the invention of Mahler's publicist and did not enchant the composer; nevertheless the nickname has stuck with the very ambitious work. At those first performances there were two choruses of 250 each, plus 350 children, and an orchestra of 146 players. Add in the required eight vocal soloists for a total of 1,004 musicians. Whether or not the number of performers at this 1948 Royal Albert Hall performance equated to a similar number we may never know. The solo singers were Elena Danieli, Dora van Doorn, Emelie Hooke (something of a specialist in contemporary music), Mary Jarred, Gladys Ripley, William Herbert (the Australian tenor who recorded Handel's Messiah under Hermann Scherchen), George Pizzey and Harold Williams. Sir Adrian Boult conducted a battalion of choruses and the BBC Symphony Orchestra in a live broadcast of a Henry Wood Concert Society presentation.

Indeed it was Sir Henry Wood who had given the UK premiere of Mahler's Eighth Symphony, on 15 April 1930, also with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. Not surprisingly for music requiring such gargantuan forces to bring it to life, performances of it took a while to reach the corners of the world. Early ones included the Dutch premiere in March 1912, under Willem Mengelberg, and the American one, courtesy of Leopold Stokowski in Philadelphia, in March 1916.

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As mentioned, Wood brought Mahler 8 to London in 1930, the Japanese premiere was in December 1949 (Kazuo Yamada conducting in Tokyo) and October 1951 found Eugene Goossens launching the work in Sydney, Australia.

We probably do not think of the English conductor Sir Adrian Boult as a champion of Mahler. Yet he was interested enough in his music to travel to Amsterdam when Mengelberg undertook a Mahler festival in 1920 (the composer had died in 1911) and seemed favourably disposed to it. Boult conducted the UK premiere of Symphony No. 3 (which was recorded and is available on the Testament label) and he also conducted other symphonies including *Das Lied von der Erde* (written between the eighth and ninth symphonies) and numbers 5 and 7.

Sir Adrian Boult had a long and distinguished career. Boult, christened Adrian Cedric, was born in Chester on 8 April 1889 and died on 22 February 1983 at the age of 93. He studied music at both Christ Church, Oxford and, during 1912 and 1913, the Leipzig Conservatory. Between 1919 and 1930 Boult was a member of the teaching staff of the Royal College of Music (returning there in the 1960s) and in 1924 he was appointed Conductor of the City of Birmingham Orchestra (as it was known then: 'Symphony' was added to the designation in 1948).

In 1930 Boult was invited to become Director of Music at the recently formed British Broadcasting Corporation (with a knighthood following in 1937), a role that required him to establish the BBC Symphony Orchestra, which he led as Chief Conductor until 1950. Following enforced retirement from the Corporation, he then became Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, until 1957, which he would continue to conduct regularly until he officially retired in 1979.



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Although Boult conducted and recorded much British music (both the highways and byways of it) and is very closely associated with it – Elgar, Holst and Vaughan Williams were close friends (Boult led the premieres of Holst’s *The Planets* and several of Vaughan Williams’s symphonies) – his repertoire was large and varied and involved numerous other premieres. These included the first performances in the UK of Berg’s *Wozzeck*, Busoni’s *Doktor Faust* (both concert performances; mpLIVE will issue *Wozzeck* in 2010) and Bartók’s Concerto for Orchestra. As well as having an open mind to the latest music, Boult was a master of the conductor’s technical craft. In 1920 he wrote ‘A Handbook on the Technique of Conducting’, which he entitled *The Point of the Stick*.

Boult’s conducting of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony is typically direct, cohesive and thought through. This is Mahler’s oratorio symphony (*Das Lied von der Erde* is his song-cycle symphony), the first movement concerned with the power of creation, the second (a setting of the final scene of Goethe’s *Faust*) to do with human love. The words for the first movement are from a medieval text, *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, Mahler’s setting of the original Latin (initiated by an organ) striding forward, reflecting as appropriate, and transforming to blazing drama and a transcendental conclusion.

If the first movement may be akin to a choral symphony on its own terms, Symphony No. 8’s second (and last) movement is the oratorical part of the work in which the soloists are kept busy, yet Mahler is also clearly demarcating a slow movement, scherzo and finale within the overall structure, the latter not far removed from the effect of its counterpart in the Second Symphony (the subtitle ‘Resurrection’ is his, unlike the publicity-seeking moniker bestowed upon the

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Eighth by an impresario) and which Mahler described (to Mengelberg) thus: ‘Try to imagine the whole universe beginning to ring and resound. These are no longer human voices, but planets and suns revolving.’ As a whole, this movement traces from dark to light, from the secluded, through Faust’s redemption, and to a final divine vision – and to emphasise that this is indeed a symphony, music from the opening movement returns to conclude the work.

Inevitably, the sound on this 1948 Boult-conducted performance is limited; yet one can hear the charge of the performance, the dedication and fine rehearsal of the musicians taking part in a rare performance of music not then commercially recorded and in an era when the only way to get to know music as complex as this was through the score, at a concert or over the wireless. Furthermore, the space of the Royal Albert Hall is evident enough, the only possible indoor arena in London to have played this music then (the Queen’s Hall had been destroyed during World War II and the Royal Festival Hall was a couple of years from opening).

Given that Mahler conceived this work as a symphony, Boult is one of the ideal conductors to present it with a full appreciation of its design without denuding the of its drama, rich incidental beauty and vision. Although not all the solo singers may be household names, admirers of Mary Jarred, Gladys Ripley, William Herbert and Harold Williams will be delighted to have a further example of their work, and although most of the performers will now have passed away, sadly, no doubt there are many that took part as schoolchildren who remain with us and will revel in re-living this performance now available to all through a medium not dreamt of 60 years ago.

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The original sources are stored in the Borthwick Library at the University of York, where they are curated by Dr. Christopher Webb. Many of them are unique, irreplaceable and fragile: acetates in particular have an unpredictable shelf-life and require extremely careful handling. They are being remastered by Roger Beardsley, who has a worldwide reputation in the field, to the highest possible standard, with the emphasis kept on the feel of the live performance.

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Roger Beardsley

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Recorded: 10 February 1948, Royal Albert Hall, London

From the Music Preserved Collection

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