

**GUSTAV MAHLER**  
**DAS LIED VON DER ERDE**  
**ALICE COOTE – BURKHARD FRITZ**  
**NETHERLANDS PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**  
**MARC ALBRECHT**

## **Gustav Mahler** (1860-1911)

### **Das Lied von der Erde**

The Song of Earth – Le Chant de la Terre

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**Burkhard Fritz**, tenor

**Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra, Amsterdam**

conducted by

**Marc Albrecht**

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### **Das Lied von der Erde [‘The Song of the Earth’]**

**I can only compose when I am experiencing something; I can only experience something when I am composing!”**

**I**n the summer of 1908, Gustav Mahler writes his friend, conductor Bruno Walter, from Toblach: “First, I went about making myself at home here. This time, however, I not only have to adjust my surroundings, but the way I live, as well.” What had happened? In the spring of 1907, the Viennese press had launched a new hate and slander campaign against Mahler as director of the court opera, and this time, successfully: Mahler had concluded he had no choice but to relinquish his position. Holidays in Maiernigg by Lake Wörth (German: *Wörthersee*) had been supposed to bring rest and tranquillity following this turbulent period, but only a few days after their arrival, Mahler’s oldest daughter, Maria (‘Putzi’), developed symptoms of scarlet fever, and died on 12 July. And as though this had not been enough, shortly thereafter, Mahler was diagnosed with a heart ailment, which, although at the time not life-threatening, was nevertheless interpreted by the composer as his death sentence.

Mahler spent the summer of 1908 in Toblach, in the Dolomites. But, as he wrote Bruno Walter, this time he forbade himself his favourite forms of relaxation – swimming, rowing and long climbing hikes. “I intend to avoid every form of stress, constantly to monitor myself, and keep my walking to a minimum. At the same time, in this isolation, which heightens my awareness of my inner processes, I feel more clearly everything in my body that is not as it should be.” In Toblach, although Gustav and his wife Alma initially shared every moment, due to the absorption of each in their own sorrow, the recent events ultimately drove a wedge between them. Gustav immersed himself entirely in his work. In the following winter, he journeyed to New York, where he conducted the Metropolitan Opera for four months.

In 1907, Mahler’s friend Theobald Pollak had given him, as a gift, the poetry collection, ‘The Chinese Flute,’ by the young poet, Hans Bethge. It contained 83 versions of poems by numerous Chinese authors, which Bethge, who himself did not speak Chinese, had based on existing German and French translations. At the time, such ‘versions’ of non-Western poetry were highly fashionable, and ‘The Chinese Flute’ was an immediate success, not lastly because the atmosphere of its poems was entirely in harmony with the orientalism which had been in fashion in Europe since the World Exposition held in Paris in 1889.

Bethge’s poems brought the seemingly timeless Chinese texts upon which they were based closer to the work of the German poets of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, in particular that of Goethe and Rückert. This emerges clearly from the collection’s somewhat droning preface: “He [the poet, Li-Tai-Po] created poems about the subtly transient and

unutterable beauty of the world, the eternal pain and puzzling nature of all that exists. In his breast he encompasses the entire dull melancholy of the world, and even in moments of highest joy cannot free himself of the earth’s shadows. In his works, transience is the ceaseless warning borne by the seal of his emotions. [...] His art is at once earthly and ethereal. He is a medium of powerful symbols. In his poetry, we sense a mystical wind from far-off clouds. The pain of the cosmos is at work within him. In him hammers the inscrutable destiny of the world.” Mahler himself would also ‘do his bit’: in composing *Das Lied*, he further modified Bethge’s poems, bringing them closer to the spirit of the fin de siècle. This is illustrated in the text of the work’s powerful conclusion: *Die Liebe Erde allüberall blüht auf im Lenz und grünt aufs neu! Allüberall und ewig blauen licht die Fernen! Ewig.... Ewig....* [“The beloved earth is everywhere in flower in the springtime and leafs anew! Everywhere and eternally the distance turns a delicate blue! Forever... Forever...”. In contrast, Bethge’s version adheres more closely to Wang-Wei’s original text: *Die Erde ist die gleiche überall, und ewig, ewig sind die weißen Wolken* [“The earth is the same everywhere, and eternal, eternal are her white clouds”].

Mahler began work on *Das Lied* following the death of Maria, whilst under the spell of Bethge’s collection. Alma writes in her memoirs: “Now – after the death of our child, after the doctor’s dreadful diagnosis, in that terrible isolation, so far from our home, and so far from his normal place of work (which we had fled), these indescribably sorrowful poems now grabbed hold of him, and he sketched, already in Schludersbach, on expansive lonely paths, the orchestral songs which, a year later, would become *The Song of the Earth*.” (Alma’s dating can incidentally not be regarded as an entirely accurate representation of the actual sequence of events: whilst she writes that Mahler already began work on *Das Lied* in the summer of 1907, this is not especially plausible, as the collection, ‘The Chinese Flute,’ first came out in October of that year!)

Composing helped Mahler to come to terms with life – the observation he had made previously, applied once again: “I can only compose when I am experiencing something: I can only experience something when I am composing!” He writes Bruno Walter: “If I am to find my way to myself again, I must subject myself to the terrors of loneliness. [...] The fact that I must die is nothing new to me. But without trying here to explain or describe to you something for which there is perhaps no word, I want to say to you that, all at once, I simply lost all of the clarity and peace I had ever achieved, and stood face to face with the void, so that now, at the end of my life, I must, like a beginner, again learn to walk and stand.”

**“the most personal thing I have created up to now”**

In September, Mahler announces that the new work is complete: "I worked very diligently [...]. I myself do not know what the whole thing should be called. It was a beautiful time, and I believe that it is probably the most personal thing I have created up to now."

These lines call two interesting aspects to our attention: the question of the new work's title, and the composer's belief that it was his most personal utterance up to then. The latter aspect can come as no surprise: Mahler's music is highly personal. With every note, the composer speaks of his ideas, his emotions and his life. Only two years earlier, on 18 August 1906, Mahler had already written Willem Mengelberg words with almost the same thrust: "I have just completed my 8th – it is my greatest achievement thus far, and so unique as to content and form that it is not even possible to write about it. Imagine that the universe begins to sound. It is no longer human voices that we hear, but the revolving of planets and suns." The "most personal" as opposed to the "greatest." Whilst the Eighth Symphony focuses, to use a term of Boethius, on the *musica mundana*, or the music of the spheres, *Das Lied von der Erde* concentrates on what the latter called the *musica humana*, or the harmony of the body and spirit. And this is entirely consistent with the zeitgeist. At the start of the 20th century, to be 'modern,' art was generally expected to give expression to a virtually limitless subjectivity, aptly encapsulated by Musicologist Mathias Hansen as follows: "A young generation of artists glorified it [subjectivity] to excess, to the point of mystification, and believed to have found in unbridled self-expression the impulse of life itself, purified of all banal 'reality.'" In Hansen's view, Mahler, who according to him was convinced of his own supremacy, indeed believed that the universal problems of the human condition could only be transformed into music by means of an extreme personal subjectivity. Bruno Walter wrote: "it [*Das Lied von der Erde*] is a work of the ego, the likes of which Mahler has never produced before, not even in the First. [...] In it, the ego itself becomes the experience, whilst the world sinks below it – an emotional power of limitless proportions unfolds as it [the ego] takes leave; and every tone he has written here speaks only of him, every thousand-year-old word that he has set to music expresses only him [...]."

#### "Forever.... Forever"

According to Theodor Adorno, even the simplest of phrases in *Das Lied* has a personal quality. Adorno compares the work's tone to the speech of an old man, whose words transcend direct meaning and bring with them the experiences of an entire life. Life and death as the dialectic extremes between the mortal and the eternal, between accepted death and the rebirth of new life, which explains why, for this work, Mahler was forced to abandon sonata form and invent a

new, hybrid formal structure.

And this leads us directly to Mahler's question as to the work's title. It is a well-known anecdote that Mahler, superstitious as he was, was afraid to pen his Ninth, as, for Beethoven and Bruckner it had meant their symphonic swansong. For this reason, so goes the anecdote, Mahler entitled the new work, which to be sure had been composed after the Eighth Symphony, 'Symphony for Alto, Tenor and Large Orchestra,' but did not number it. It would be the *next* symphony, completed in 1909, which would bear the ordinal number, nine. A nice anecdote, but nothing more than that. It is true, though, that *Das Lied von der Erde* is a work that defies categorisation. It represents a synthesis of the two great pillars in Mahler's oeuvre, the symphony and the song. On the face of it, it is cycle of six orchestral songs. But at the same time, it features *three* protagonists: not just the two solo voices, but the orchestra as well, and its formal structure is symphonic in nature.

This structure can be divided into two parts. The first five movements (accounting roughly for half of the piece) exhibit a progression of tonal centres that begins in A minor and ends in A major. The sixth and final movement, *Der Abschied* [Farewell], begins in C minor and ends in C major. Of the first five movements, the first and last are both drinking songs. The first movement, *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde* [The Drinking Song of the Earth's Misery], introduces the thematic material for the entire work: *Schon winkt der Wein im gold'nen Pokale, doch trinkt noch nicht, erst sing' ich euch ein Lied! Das Lied vom Kummer soll auf-lachend in die Seele euch klingen. Wenn der Kummer naht, liegen wüst die Gärten der Seele, welkt hin und stirbt die Freude, der Gesang* ["Even though the wine already beckons in the golden cup, do not drink just yet; first I shall sing you a song! You shall hear the Song of Sorrow as it laughs fleetingly in your soul. When sorrow nears, the gardens of the soul lie untended, joy and song wither away and die"]. The movement's conclusion, in which the eternal cycle of nature is celebrated, already announces: *Das Firmament blaut ewig, und die Erde wird lange fest steh'n und aufblüh'n im Lenz* ["The firmament shall blue forever, and the earth shall long stand firm and bloom again in spring"].

The fifth song, *Der Trunkene im Frühling* ['The Drunken One in Spring'] shows us the other side of the coin: *Wenn nur ein Traum das Leben ist, warum denn Müh' und Plag? Ich trinke, bis ich nicht mehr trinken kann, den ganzen, lieben Tag!* ["If life is but a dream, why all the effort and misery? I drink until I can drink no more, all the beloved day!"]. The poet seeks salvation in drunkenness and oblivion and tries, in this way, to let life pass by. This song, too, contains a symbol from the cycle of seasons; the birds announce the spring, but the poet is not interested: *Was geht mich denn der Frühling an? Laßt mich betrunken sein!* ["What is the spring

to me? Let me be drunk!"]. These five movements are small miniatures – remembrances of, and meditations on, earthly life, nature, youth, beauty. They prepare the listener for the work's long finale: *Der Abschied*.

For this last movement, Mahler employed two poems, the first based on one by Mong-Kao-Jen, the second on one by Wang-Wei. The opening sets the tone with its dull tamtam strokes. The scene is an evening landscape. The birds that previously announced the spring are now still. The weary return home and, in sleep, seek oblivion and new strength (*um im Schlaf vergess'nes Glück und Jugend neu zu lernen* ["to learn forgotten happiness and youth again in sleep"]). The 'lute' that accompanied the Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde is now only a 'prop.' This first portion of the last movement culminates in the ecstatic phrase, *O Schönheit! O ewigen Liebens – Lebens – trunk'ne Welt!* ["Oh beauty! Oh world drunk with eternal love and life!"]. The funeral march from the beginning of the movement returns, and expands into a great intermezzo: a 'rite of passage.' When the solo voice returns, the 'I' perspective of the beginning has changed to that of 'he.' We are the spectators of a farewell ritual. The discourse once again involves drink: *Er stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm den Trunk des Abschieds dar* ["He got off his horse and proffered him the farewell drink"]. But who is 'he'? And what is the nature of the farewell drink? Is it death, as traditionally represented on horseback? This interpretation is indeed confirmed later in the text: *Ich suche Ruhe für mein einsam Herz! Ich wandle nach der Heimat, meiner Stätte. Ich werde niemals in die Ferne schweifen. Still ist mein Herz und harret seiner Stunde!* ["I seek peace for my lonely heart! I'm returning home, to my place. I shall never wander off into the distance. My heart is still and awaits its hour!"].

These lines are not by Wang-Wei. It was Mahler himself who added them, as he did those concluding the first movement, which, like the finale, also involves both the eternal cycle of nature and death. The lines are entirely consistent with the philosophy of one Gustav Theodor Fechner, who regarded death as a transition to a third – immaterial – level of existence. In the winter of life, man dies and becomes one with the eternal, but a new spring will begin anew in nature. The final chord of *Der Abschied* is a C major chord with an added sixth (A). In this way, Mahler provides musical illustration of the cyclical in nature, as the notes of this A-G-E-C-chord all come from measures 5 through 6 of the melody in the violins at the start of the first movement.

Benjamin Britten was extremely moved by this conclusion when he heard it, via a radio broadcast, for the very first time, and found it reminiscent of the *liebestod* from Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde': "*The same harmonic progressions that Wagner used to colour his essentially morbid love scene (his 'Liebes' is naturally followed by 'Tod')* re-used here to paint a serenity literally supernatural. I cannot understand it – it passes

over me like a tidal wave – and that matters not a jot either, because it goes on forever, even if it is never performed again – that final chord is printed in the atmosphere.”

In commenting on *Das Lied von der Erde* to Bruno Walter, Mahler was laconic: “What do you think? Is it at all tolerable? Won’t people commit suicide after it?” He then he pointed to the piece’s rhythmic difficulties and asked jokingly: ‘Have you any idea how it can be conducted? I haven’t.’” Mahler himself would not live to hear the work’s premiere, which took place on 20 November 1911 as part of a memorial concert for the composer, who had died on 18 May of that year. It was under the baton of his friend Bruno Walter, who had witnessed its birth from nearby.

## Alice Coote

Renowned on the great recital, concert and opera stages of the world, Alice Coote’s career has taken her from her beginnings in the north of England (born in Cheshire) in local singing festivals and playing Oboe in the Cheshire Youth Orchestra to being regarded as one of the great artists of today.

She trained at Guildhall School of Music & Drama (GSMD), Royal Northern College of Music (RNCM) and The National Opera Studio, receiving during this time the Decca Kathleen Ferrier Prize and the Brigitte Fassbaender Prize for Lieder Interpretation.

The recital platform is central to her musical life. Alice performs throughout the UK, Europe and the US at the Wigmore Hall, the BBC Proms, the Concertgebouw, the Lincoln Centre and Carnegie Hall in New York, among many others. She recently has performed Schubert’s *Winterreise* in Chicago and Frankfurt and Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* in Amsterdam and with the London Philharmonia. Judith Weir’s *The Voice of Desire* was written for her. Most recently, she toured Europe in *La Clemenza di Tito* with Louis Langree and the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, and is currently a BBC Proms’ resident artist, where she has performed with Julius Drake, the London Philharmonic and the Apostles with the Halle Orchestra

Acclaimed in particular for Mahler, Berlioz, Mozart, Handel and Bach with orchestras such as LSO, BBC Radio Symphony, Boston Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Netherlands Philharmonic, Concert D’Astree, Halle and Concertgebouw she has collaborated with conductors including Gergiev, Dohnanyi, Belohavek, Elder and Boulez.

## Burkhard Fritz

The German tenor Burkhard Fritz studied at the Johannes Brahms Conservatory in his native Hamburg. He attended the master class of Alfredo Kraus and from 2000 to 2006 pursued further studies with Arturo Sergi. After his first permanent engagement, with the Bremerhaven Stadttheater, he was until 2004 a member of the ensemble of the Musiktheater im Revier in Gelsenkirchen, where he sang numerous lyric rôles, with Max in *Der Freischütz* and *Parsifal*, achieving great success as Berlioz’s *Benvenuto Cellini*. He was a guest artist with the Aalto Theater in Essen in rôles including Florestan, and with the Oldenburg Staatstheater he sang the title rôle in *Idomeneo*. Since the 2004/05 season he has been a permanent member of the ensemble of the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin, where he sang *Parsifal* under the baton of Daniel Barenboim as well as Florestan, Dimitri in *Boris Godunov*, Cavaradossi, and *Alvaro* in *La forza del destino*. Guest engagements have taken him to the Tiroler Landestheater in Innsbruck and the Hanover Staatsoper, and in Rotterdam and Amsterdam he sang *Faust* in Berlioz’s *La damnation de Faust* under Valery Gergiev. He made his Vienna Staatsoper début in 2006 as *Parsifal*. In concert he has appeared in, among other works, Schoenberg’s *Gurre-Lieder* in Stuttgart and in Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* under Daniel Barenboim.

## Marc Albrecht

Acclaimed for his interpretations of Wagner and Strauss, as well as for his commitment to contemporary music, Marc Albrecht holds the position of Chief Conductor of both the Netherlands Opera and Netherlands Philharmonic and Chamber Orchestras, and is a regular guest at Europe’s most prestigious opera houses and orchestras. In the early years of his conducting career, Albrecht spent several seasons at the opera houses of Hamburg and Dresden, and also was appointed personal assistant to Claudio Abbado at the Gustav Mahler Youth Orchestra in Vienna. In 1995 he embarked on a highly successful 6 year tenure as Music Director of the Staatstheater Darmstadt, and from 2006-2011, he was Artistic Director and Chief Conductor of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg.

Marc Albrecht has appeared with many key orchestras in Europe including the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Accademia di Santa Cecilia in Rome, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, Staatskapelle Dresden, Munich Philharmonic, and the Orchestre National de Lyon. In 2006 he made his BBC Proms debut in London with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Recent successes have included his US debut with the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, return visits to the Hallé Orchestra, Vienna Symphony Orchestra and the Radio-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and debut performances with the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, the Residentie Orkest (The Hague), Orchestre National de France, Maggio Musicale Firenze and the SWR Sinfonieorchester Stuttgart. Future highlights include debuts with the Danish National Symphony, Gothenburg Symphony, Dallas Symphony, and Bergen Philharmonic Orchestras, and return visits to the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, the Filarmonica della Scala, and the Orchestre Nazionale Sinfonica della RAI Torino.

In the opera house, Marc Albrecht's highly acclaimed work during the past seasons has included a new production of *Der fliegende Holländer* at the Bayreuth Festival (2003–2006), *Die Bacchantinnen* by Wellesz at the Salzburg Festival (2003) as well as Janacek's *From the House of the Dead* at the Opéra National de Paris (2005). From 2001-2004 he was Principal Guest Conductor at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, leading successful productions such as Messiaen's *Saint Francois d'Assise*, and he also maintains a close relationship with the Semperoper Dresden, where amongst others he has conducted *La Damnation de Faust*, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and *Elektra*. Recent highlights include Henze's *Die Bassariden* at the Bavarian State Opera, his debut at the Royal Opera House Covent Garden with *Der fliegende Holländer*, Henze's *Der Prinz von Homburg* at Vienna's Theater an der Wien, *Lulu* at the Geneva Opera and at the Salzburg Festival (with the Vienna Philharmonic), and a notable success standing in at short notice in 2012 to make his debut at Teatro alla Scala with *Die Frau ohne Schatten*.

At the Netherlands Opera he has conducted productions of *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *Fidelio*, *Carmen*, and since his appointment as Music Director, *Elektra*, *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* and the world premiere of Manfred Trojahn's *Orest*, and in their 2012.13 season he will conduct new productions of Schreker's *Der Schatzgräber*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *Die Meistersinger von Nurnberg*. Forthcoming productions elsewhere include *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the Staatsoper Berlin, a double bill of Zemlinsky's *Eine Florentinische Tragödie* and *Der Zwerg* at the Teatro alla Scala, and Tannhauser and *Die Soldaten* at Zurich Opera.

Marc Albrecht has made a sequence of acclaimed recordings for PentaTone records with the Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg, including discs of Strauss tone poems, the piano concertos of Dvorak and Schumann with Martin Helmchen, Korngold's *Symphony in F sharp* and the orchestral music of Berg, Dukas, Koechlin and Ravel. He continues his association with PentaTone with the Netherlands Philharmonic, and their first recording of Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* is due for release in 2013.

## The Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra

The Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the major orchestras in the Netherlands. Together with the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra it is the resident orchestra of the Netherlands Opera in the Amsterdam Music Theatre, as well as one of the resident orchestras at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. It is a welcome guest at other venues in the Netherlands, as well as on the international stages and at the festivals abroad.

The versatility of the orchestra and the hospitality it shows towards its audience are reflected in the programmes it chooses for its concerts.

Thanks to its exemplary educational outreach programme NedPhO GO!, the Netherlands Philharmonic has made a great name for itself: to this end, it opens the doors to its 'NedPhO-Koepel' – a monumental converted church in a residential area in the eastern part of Amsterdam.

Under the leadership of its first chief conductor Hartmut Haenchen, the orchestra's performance of Wagner's integral Ring cycle at Netherlands Opera, as well as its integral Mahler cycle at the Concertgebouw, caused a sensation. Over the years, the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra has performed almost all the operas of Wagner and Strauss. Under its second chief conductor Yakov Kreizberg, the orchestra entered into an exclusive recording contract with the PentaTone label, and performed at several major festivals, including the BBC Proms. At the start of the 2011-2012 season, Marc Albrecht was appointed chief conductor of both the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the Netherlands Opera.

Marc Albrecht has conducted the orchestra in productions of *Elektra*, *Fidelio*, *The Magic Flute*, *Kitezh* (Rimsky-Korsakov), *Der Schatzgräber* (Franz Schreker), and *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, (Richard Strauss). Numerous concert performances with soloists such as Antje Weithaas, Elizabeth Watts, Christian Tetzlaff, Natalie Stutzmann, Kari Kriikku, Lars Vogt, and Jean Guyhen Queras were received exuberantly by audiences and critics alike.

Each year, in addition to numerous concerts and opera productions, the orchestra releases various CDs. Their CD of Richard Strauss' *Elektra* with Marc Albrecht, released in October 2012, was hailed by the international press as one of the most important recordings of this opera.

