

**Mahler: Symphony No. 6 (study score). Neue Kritische Gesamtausgabe, Reinhold Kubik, ed. C.F. Peters and Kaplan Foundation. EP 11210**

It has long been known that Erwin Ratz's first Critical Edition of Mahler's Sixth Symphony (1963) had some serious editorial problems as regards the work's basic text. Conductor Norman Del Mar very thoughtfully wrote an entire book about many of them several decades ago. This new Critical Edition also addresses quite a few without, however, resolving some very basic questions about Mahler's intentions in a scholarly and intellectually honest manner. Indeed, particularly as regards the question of the order of the inner movements, the arguments presented here seem as much emotional and political as they are logical and dispositive. If the preparation of a Critical Edition involved only the mechanical act of accurately reproducing the composer's last thoughts, it would be difficult to take issue with the results contained in the present volume; but the situation with Mahler, and with the Sixth Symphony in particular, is far more complex and resists the simplistic answers that editor Reinhold Kubik proposes.

Furthermore, beyond the important but basically clerical task of correcting obvious errors and misreadings, there are some issues that can only be resolved, or at least accurately described, through stylistic insight and musical imagination. At the end of the day, no matter how meticulous the approach, there is simply no substitute. Whether in failing to correct the IGMG's patently ridiculous "definitive" reading of the opening of the First Symphony's Funeral March, in which we are told that the double bass solo doesn't really mean "solo" at all, or in the discussion of the Sixth's Scherzo/Andante controversy, Kubik reveals himself as a singularly unsympathetic and uncomprehending advocate of Mahler's music, one (it sometimes seems) more interested in scoring points at the expense of his predecessors at the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft Wien than in offering interpreters the tools that they need to make intelligent and informed performance decisions.

That said, there's no question that the new edition offers some salutary examples of plain good housekeeping, and deserves credit accordingly. Mahler's habit of perpetual revision makes it difficult to maintain that he ever actually finished anything to his satisfaction, and cleaning up the resultant mass of tiny adjustments and modifications, wherever they occur, can be quite a job. The Sixth Symphony, in particular, was left in an especially messy state before Mahler was forced to move on to other projects. No doubt, had he lived, he would have gone over the entire work from top to bottom; but he didn't do it, and Kubik pretty much has. For this reason alone most Mahler fans (never mind performers) will want to study this new score, and thanks to C. F. Peters and support from the Kaplan Foundation, it's available at a not-too-insane price (around \$125-150 or so).

Consider a couple of examples of Kubik's more useful fixes. One such occurs measure 100 of the Andante, right after the "alpine" cowbell episode. Previously, the string parts appeared as follows (example from Kubik's previous edition,

representing his first crack at fixing some of Ratz's more obvious errors and omissions):

In the new edition, which is also very neatly printed on larger paper, allowing for a more spaciouly laid out text, the second violins double the firsts in the initial bar of the above passage (corresponding to the last bar of the example below). The remainder of the second violin part follows the prior version. Mahler's “*ohne Expression*” indication here (in all versions) is also one of those numerous bits of evidence suggesting that something quite similar to modern vibrato was the norm in orchestral string playing of the day—but that’s another story, and we can only be thankful that the editorial team at the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft Wien hasn’t (yet) signed on to the “authenticity” nonsense in this regard coming from the likes of Roger Norrington and his fellow cultists, although Kubik’s published comments reveal him as sympathetic to this foolishness as well.

In the finale, at measure 42, the horns, and later the trumpets, have the following figure [in the previous edition]:

Kubik has added "*ohne Beschleunigung*" ("without acceleration") to Mahler's "*Zeit lassen*" ("take time") instruction over the horn part, and restored one of those famous Mahlerian explanatory footnotes: "The horns play in a dragging tempo to the end [of the phrase], without concerning themselves with the accelerando in the other instruments." All of these, and many other examples, are just basic, good editing, and it wouldn't be fair not to take notice of them.

Even here, however, some problems remain. One concerns the timpani parts in the recapitulation of the finale. Kubik has opted to print them on one staff, but still insists on dividing the line between two players, even though there is no longer any practical reason for it. Given Mahler's wholesale deletions, the entire part right up to the last page easily can be performed by the principal timpanist alone. This example does, however, raise an interesting question, namely, the provisional nature of all such emendations. It's entirely possible, for example, that some of the original parts might be reinstated and that the revision should not be seen necessarily as definitive. Leaving the part as Mahler did, for two players, might have been his purely practical concession to the already-printed text, or it might be a sign of an unfulfilled intention to revisit the issue at a later time.

Hans Redlich's Eulenburg score, for example, includes the original timpani and percussion parts (including the third hammer blow), and while it's difficult to take issue with many of Mahler's cancellations there are a few places, such as the beginning of the recapitulation with its independent and very exciting writing for the two timpanists, where the original reading might prove tremendously effective. These are the sorts of options a thoughtful Critical Edition should consider providing prospective performers. The argument that one should not "mix" editions won't wash here, as Mahler never lived to authorize a fully revised printing of the symphony incorporating all of his changes. All we have are the first printed scores plus a mass of miscellaneous corrections, the whole business dating from around the time of the symphony's premiere performances.

In other words this is not the same situation as obtains, say, with Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, which exists in two complete and independent versions (and notwithstanding which many conductors have no qualms about sticking with Robert Haas's arguably superior hybrid blending of the two). We must keep in mind that Mahler's Sixth was performed only seven times over the course of his entire life, all in the period between May 1906 and April 1907. This hardly constitutes a meaningful performance tradition. Mahler himself conducted it publicly (always with the Andante preceding the Scherzo) a mere three times in seven months. After January 4, 1907, he never heard the piece again in the four years remaining to him. During this initial run of performances the music was still quite obviously in the "tinkering" stage, and tinker he certainly did.

Thus to insist, as Gilbert Kaplan does in his preface to the present edition, that Mahler's decision to place the Andante second, was "final" and "unequivocal" is

terribly naïve, as well as irresponsible. No one who knows anything about Mahler's working habits, either with his own music or that of any of the composers that he conducted regularly, would use those words so inappropriately. Kaplan maintains that new evidence has come to light, thanks to research by Kubik and Mahler fan Jerry Bruck, that supports the "Andante second" theory. In fact very little, heck—nothing—of relevance is new, and Henry-Louis de la Grange dispenses with Bruck's assertions quite effectively in an appendix to the final volume of his epic Mahler biography. More significantly, absolutely none of this purportedly new evidence tells us anything useful about the *finality* of Mahler's intentions, which is of course the whole point. Indeed, given the above performance history, how could it?

And so we come to the main issue, indeed what Kubik concedes is the principal justification for this new edition: establishing the correct order of the Sixth Symphony's inner movements as Andante first, and then Scherzo.

In his preface Kubik, citing Bruck's research, invites us to consider a raft of historical detail that, while often interesting in and of itself, offers precious little information germane to the matter at hand. The only significant facts directly pertaining to the order of the inner movements, all of them long known to Mahlerians, are the following:

1. Mahler originally composed and published the symphony in the order Scherzo/Andante.
2. Mahler reversed this order in the three performances that he conducted during his lifetime, and further asked his publisher to alert other potential performers of this change.
3. In 1919, at the request of conductor Wilhelm Mengelberg, Alma Mahler indicated that Mahler's final, preferred order was the original Scherzo/Andante.

This is the only solid evidence that we have of Mahler's intentions, and it is all that truly matters in this respect. However, the issue is complicated by the fact the Erwin Ratz, in his first Critical Edition, essentially made up a story that Mahler ultimately changed his mind sometime before his death and on this basis Ratz claimed that he was justified in restoring the original Scherzo/Andante order. This questionable tactic, admittedly, was as sleazy as some of his editing was sloppy, but it cannot be used as an argument against preferring the original movement order on either the above evidentiary or purely musical grounds. Flogging Ratz is thus nothing more than a waste of time and a distraction.

Kubik nevertheless, with evident relish, does just that, trying to make a Big Deal out of Ratz's misfeasance; but that's politics, not scholarship. Trashing your predecessor is a popular sport in the world of academia--one that also enjoys substantial support from music publishers looking for reasons to keep what would otherwise be public domain, popular pieces under copyright. The very fact that the International Gustav

Mahler Society is located in Vienna at all reflects mere economic opportunism—a belated recognition by the city that despised and rejected his music (until it became an international success in the late 1960s) that the Mahler business could be exploited as yet another feather in Vienna’s cultural cap. By rights the European center of Mahler scholarship ought to be located in the city historically most receptive to his genius: Amsterdam.

More to the point, the fact that Ratz at least partially fabricated a justification for restoring Mahler’s original intentions does not excuse doing much the same thing in order to assert a similar claim regarding the revised order of the inner movements, and this is exactly what the editors of the present edition have done. Specifically, to the extent that Kubik and Bruck disregard and attempt to discredit Alma’s unequivocal statement to Mengelberg--which they explicitly do--and on the basis of the remaining facts claim to have divined Mahler’s ultimate intentions, they are committing precisely the same error as Ratz. They are posing as mind readers, and passing off the result of their mystical revelations as scholarship. De la Grange discusses extensively just why Alma’s comments cannot be dismissed as evidence of Mahler’s true feelings. Suffice it to say that she was in the best possible position to know if Mahler had in fact decided to restore the original movement order, and there isn’t a shred of evidence to suggest that she was mistaken or had any reason to misrepresent his intentions in this regard.

So as far as the facts go, then, we have on the one hand what Mahler actually did when he last performed the symphony, and on the other hand, what he originally composed and what his wife reported that he ultimately wanted. Any objective observer would be compelled to admit that this constitutes strong evidence for both perspectives. This being the case, the responsible thing to do in revisiting the need for a new Critical Edition would be to set out all of the arguments on each side, and then *take no position*. Let the performers decide, and admit frankly that if the criterion for making a decision regarding the correct order of the inner movements must be what Mahler himself ultimately wanted, then no final answer is possible. This is the only honest approach, and it would be no different than what many of the better Critical Editions do—consider for example Philip Gossett’s editions of Rossini and Verdi operas, which attempt to present all significant, legitimate variant readings to the performer as long as they originate with the composer (or have his express sanction).

The fact that Kubik and his team have come down unequivocally on the “Andante first” side of this dispute has some serious, and rather depressing, methodological implications for their work. It is based on a series of assumptions that are, at bottom, not just highly questionable, but which run directly counter to much other current scholarly thinking on the subjects of music editing and textual criticism. The first of these is the assumption that the composer’s last act, chronologically, accurately represents his ultimate intentions. This notion has a corollary: Whatever Mahler did, or felt compelled to do, must be identical to what he ideally or definitively wanted to do. Stated this way, I’m sure you can understand just how

erroneous these assumptions are: yet they lie at the very heart of the editorial decisions behind this new edition.

It's interesting in this respect to compare Kubik's approach to, say, that of the editors of the Carl Nielsen Edition in Copenhagen. In that case, the decision was made to return to the composers original pencil manuscripts, arguing that many of the changes to his scores arose from practical necessity due to inferior orchestras of the day, or pressure put on the composer by the conductors he worked with. The editors thus feel justified in returning to the original manuscripts *even where the changes were essentially sanctioned by the composer* and were effectively in place during his lifetime. The William Walton Edition from Oxford University Press took the same position in printing both the original and revised versions of his Viola Concerto in a single volume--a procedure also followed in Breitkopf und Härtel's recent issue of the original and revised scores of Sibelius' *En Saga*.

In all of these cases, the editors reject the argument that "last act" necessarily equals "definitive (or best) thought." Just imagine what this dictum would do a critical edition of a work routinely subject to drastic cuts in the composer's lifetime, such as Rachmaninov's Second Symphony, or one never performed in its original form at all, such as Berlioz' *Les Troyens*. In short, there is nothing wrong, methodologically, in returning to the composer's initial concept if this helps to clarify an intractable musical problem, or prevents a patent falsification of his intentions.

In the case of Mahler's Sixth, given the above fact pattern, we cannot argue that playing the inner movements either one way or the other falsifies his ultimate intentions, since on balance we have no way of knowing what those were--unless of course we accept Alma's evidence as dispositive, in which case the original order is indisputably correct. All we know is that Mahler had different intentions at different times during a relatively brief period in the middle of the last decade of his life. Furthermore, to insist that placing the Andante second is the only *right* way to perform the symphony because of what Mahler himself did during the initial run of performances prevents serious consideration of the problem from a different, wholly legitimate, and potentially more fruitful angle: Which order offers the more satisfying musical structure as a whole?

This last question represents the proverbial elephant in the room. As just demonstrated, scholars rightly often give particular weight to a composer's original conception, especially if it can be shown that later alterations resulted from extraneous or non-musical considerations and circumstances. This is arguably the case here. It explains why Kubik's preface contains repeated, and to be frank strikingly defensive, assertions concerning the definitiveness of Mahler's intentions in placing the Andante second. "Mahler never played the symphony any other way," they remind us, over and over, as if the sheer weight of irrelevant historical detail that they have accumulated concerning the three performances that Mahler actually conducted will enhance its value and make us forget the simple truth regarding the work's actual performance history.

Accordingly, not a word of the rhetorical smokescreen that Kubik works so hard to erect makes the slightest impact on the fact that there are very strong reasons for preferring Mahler's original movement order on purely formal grounds. Accordingly, it pays to consider the issue from this perspective as well, even if Kubik and his team will not because it's an argument they cannot win (and they probably know it).

### **Argument 1: The Fate Motive Writ Large**

One of the most important recurring ideas in the symphony is a major chord that dissolves into its minor equivalent. It occurs prominently in first movement, the finale, and the Scherzo, but with the latter in second position it also occurs *between* movements, as the contrast between the end of the first and the beginning of the Scherzo, as well as at the end of the Andante and the beginning of the finale. The overall structure of the symphony thus reflects one of its principal and most basic ideas: the gradual (and inevitable) triumph of the minor key. Reverse the movement order, and this tonal emphasis is lost. Is it really important? That's hard to say in terms of quantifiable impact on the listener, but it was unquestionably part of Mahler's original conception of the work, and it seems more consistent with its overall expressive trajectory.

### **Argument 2: Thematic Relationships**

It has often been mentioned that the Scherzo uses much of the same material as the first movement, a relationship that is unquestionably easier to hear and more telling if the two succeed one another without being separated by a quarter hour of Andante. More importantly, there is a strong precedent in Mahler for this procedure. The Fifth Symphony features pairs of movements that share themes in much the same way as do the first movement and scherzo of the Sixth. Similarly, the climax of the Adagio of the Fourth Symphony contains the opening melody of the finale, which follows immediately. It is thus unlikely, given Mahler's previous practice, that he ultimately would agree to separate two such closely related movements. Of course, it could be argued that the scherzo also shares motivic elements with the finale, but to try to justify placing the scherzo third on this basis really is to misunderstand the symphony's large-scale form. Witness:

### **Argument 3: Structural Balance**

In the Fifth Symphony the last pair of related movements is played without pause; the first two are not. The finale of the Sixth, though a single continuous movement, actually has two major components: an introduction, and the ensuing allegro. This introduction is huge and has its own form. Indeed, it's as long as some of Mahler's independent movements ("Urlicht" in the Second Symphony, the fifth movement of the Third, or the "Purgatorio" of the Tenth). Although it borrows a motive from the scherzo, as well as the fate music from the first movement, its most important

melodic connections, obviously, are to the finale by virtue of the new themes that it prefigures. In other words, the introduction looks forward more than it does backward, anticipating the quicker music to come, just as the first movement foretells the scherzo. In a work this large and complex, there are some elements that all of its movements share, and some common only to a few.

Thus, as he did in the Fifth Symphony, Mahler offers us two independent but related movements to start, followed by two related but connected ones to conclude. The music of the introduction to the Sixth's finale returns later in much the same way as does the Fifth's Adagietto, which does double (actually triple) duty as episodic material in the ensuing Rondo. Of course, the Sixth's finale is built on a much larger scale and the expressive point of the music is entirely different, but the architectural principal is remarkably similar. So although the Sixth Symphony is nominally in four movements, it operates more like a work in five, just like the preceding and succeeding symphonies. In those works, the central fulcrum on which the entire structure balances is a scherzo, and in the Sixth it's the Andante--but only if that movement occurs third, and not second.

If we add up Mahler's suggested movement timings and treat the Sixth as a work in five sections and three large parts, like the Fifth, we can see the Andante's intended centrality quite clearly. What we get is: 33 minutes (Part 1: first movement plus Scherzo), 14 minutes (Part 2: Andante), 30 minutes (Part 3: finale). The result, surely, offers a more satisfying balance of expressive and structural elements than does placing the Andante in second place, unless of course you subscribe to the theory that the symphony is so heavily weighted towards the finale that nothing that happens before really matters. This is not as ridiculous a notion as it might at first appear. If the inner movements were as important as the last, it's highly unlikely that there would be any question as to their correct order. The power, length, and complexity of the finale certainly accounts, at least in part, for the level of ambiguity regarding placement of the preceding movements, and to some performers and listeners this might well render the whole issue as moot.

For those who find the "five part" theory unconvincing, there is yet another way of looking at the relationships between the movements that argues forcibly for placing the Andante third. Its main theme is, on closer examination, a fairly straightforward lyrical transformation of the first movement's opening march. Compare the beginning of the Andante:

Erste Violinen



The image shows a musical score for the first violin part of the Andante movement. The tempo is marked "Andante moderato" and the instruction "ohne Dämpfer" (without mutes) is present. The score begins with a treble clef and a key signature of two flats. The first few measures show a melodic line starting on a half note, followed by eighth and sixteenth notes. Dynamic markings include *pp* (pianissimo), *pp subito*, and *fp* (fortissimo piano). The score is written on a single staff with a double bar line at the end.

to the principal theme of the first movement.



Actually, the melodic identity is a bit closer and easier to hear in relationship to the fortissimo version of the march that returns at measure 25, just before the first cymbal crash:

If this passage still doesn't prove convincing, then consider the oboe's extension of the Andante's opening theme--a falling cadence exactly as found in the last two bars of the march theme, in the first example above. It's a dead giveaway:

Now it could be argued that because of this relationship the Andante similarly fulfills Mahler's dictum that related movement pairs should not be separated, and therefore it might succeed the first movement just as well as the Scherzo. Indeed, it could be that Mahler himself, who obviously knew more than anyone about the various thematic references that permeate the symphony, justified his decision to switch the order of the inner movements along precisely these lines.

Still, there's no question that the connections between the first movement and the Scherzo are much closer and more obvious than those between first movement and the Andante. Mahler, who took such pains to make his intentions clearly audible, really would have had no way of knowing just how this network of motivic references and melodic variations truly sounded over some eighty minutes without playing the symphony each way a few times. And we, in turn, have no way of knowing exactly what he would have viewed as the more successful order because we don't know the specific factors that concerned him most, and to which he may have been paying special attention. Placing the Andante second thus offered a logical way for him to test the waters.

Even more significantly, keeping the Andante in the third position does in fact satisfy the above “relatedness” condition with respect to the finale significantly more effectively than does the Scherzo, for two reasons. First, both the Andante and the finale contain similar episodes featuring cowbells, again harking back to the development section of first movement, but in each case much more prominently. Second, the main theme of the Andante, which in turn derives from the first movement march, is also the principal melodic idea that opens the finale. This is easiest to hear not as the theme first appears right at the start, in a free inversion of its original form, but rather as it later returns to introduce the tranquil episode that ultimately leads to the first hammer blow (at figure 120):

This idea returns multiple times thereafter, participating fully in the hugely contrapuntal combination of the themes toward the end of the recapitulation (beginning at figure 161). With the Andante in second position, recognition of this thematic connection runs a much greater risk of being entirely lost in performance, an observation we can confirm from the mere fact that few if any commentators on the symphony to date have noticed--irrespective of movement order--either this melodic link between the Andante and the finale, or the common ancestor of these later thematic transformations in the first movement march.

These observations lend further credence to the proposition that Mahler was sampling a different arrangement of the inner movements in order to hear how the relationships he wrote into the symphony’s various parts worked in real time, in front of real listeners. This in turn militates against any claim that his decisions at those three initial performances should be regarded as “final” and “unequivocal.”

Accordingly, it’s terribly ingenuous to suggest that Mahler was able to resolve all significant performance issues with just a few auditions of the Sixth over such a brief period of time. Yet this is exactly the line that the editors of the new Critical Edition insist that we accept even though, as initially conceived, the work reveals a genuine concern for musical architecture and audible connections among the various parts that gets demonstrably weakened when the performers adopt the movement order prescribed in the present score.

#### **Argument 4: Chronology of Programmatic Explanations and Their Implications for Movement Order**

Aside from ignoring the above strong and perfectly valid formal arguments for placing the Scherzo second in line, by focusing on the “movement order” issue essentially in isolation the editors of the new Critical Edition fail to address the crucially important question of how Mahler’s decision fits into the context of his composition of, and major revisions to, the symphony as a whole. We may never know exactly what his thought process was in deciding to place the Andante second, but that it was part of an ongoing *process* there can be little doubt. There is some very intriguing and pretty definitive evidence for this that’s worth considering in detail. Combined with Henry-Louis de la Grange’s discussion of Mahler’s highly agitated mental state at the time of the symphony’s premiere, it provides some clues as to what may have been motivating him. Establishing a correct chronology of events is key to understanding this issue.

As both scholars and fans know very well, Mahler struggled throughout his entire life to achieve a balance in his works between programmatic and abstract elements. He wanted his works to be appreciated and understood as pure music, but so definite was their imagery and meaning to him, so radical their style and technique to contemporary audiences, and so personal his definition of the word “symphony,” that the issue of programmatic intent nearly always intervened and provoked debate. Perhaps in no other work of Mahler’s is this truer than in considering the Sixth Symphony. We know something of its personal significance thanks to Alma’s recollections: that the first movement’s lyrical theme represents her, that the scherzo attempts to capture the ominous, arrhythmic games of their two children, and of course that in the finale the “hero,” presumably Mahler himself, meets “three hammer blows of fate.”

No one seriously questions Alma’s interpretation of the symphony’s personal meaning generally, and for good reason: the musical reality of what Mahler did with respect to his handling of the three hammer blows supports her version, and there is corroborating evidence from others, such as Alfred Roller, in Mahler’s immediate circle. The chronology of these recollections, however, is another matter. De la Grange has shown beyond doubt that Alma has gotten her timing a bit mixed up. It would be very difficult for the Scherzo to represent (however creepily) their two children playing when the second of them hadn’t been born yet! This doesn’t mean that Alma made up a story, or that Mahler never said it; it does mean, aside from his early remarks about the existence of an “Alma theme,” that much of the discussion of the symphony’s programmatic significance likely dates from a couple of years *after* it was composed.

This may well bear directly on the issue of the correct order of the inner movements, because it means that Mahler’s fiddling in this regard took place at precisely the time he was concerned with concocting the various programmatic

narratives he would try out on his early audiences in order to “sell” the new work. Previously writers on this subject tend to assume that Mahler composed the Sixth Symphony essentially following the above programmatic parameters; that the images that Alma describes and the compositional process took place more or less simultaneously. In fact, this cannot have been the case. Mahler’s act of musical creation followed its own inner logic from the start, even if at various points along the way he may have noted personal associations between the symphony’s melodic material and concrete images from his life.

We know this in part, ironically, because Kubik actually mentions in his preface perhaps the single most critical piece of evidence, the implications of which we need to consider carefully. In discussing the autograph manuscript and publisher’s copy (*Stichvorlage*) of the Sixth, Kubik points out almost in passing that Mahler originally wrote not three hammer blows in the finale, but *five*. The missing two occur at the onslaught of the “fate” rhythm in the timpani below the major/minor chord right at the outset (measure 9), and then in the same spot in the recapitulation, just after the collapse with tam-tam crash, following what is now the second hammer blow. In other words, they simply reinforce the fate motives, exactly as does the last hammer stroke that Mahler, temporarily, allowed to remain to introduce the coda (before ultimately deleting that one as well).

The implications of this fact are fascinating, not because they show Alma’s account to be wrong, but because they confirm that what we might call the “three blows of fate narrative” was something that Mahler must have come up with at a later stage, after the work was already complete. It certainly could not have been a conceptual source of inspiration for the symphony right from the start; else, why five original hammer blows? Seen in this context, Mahler’s removal of the third (last) hammer blow, from a purely musical vantage point, does not so much represent a revision--that is, a rethinking or imposition of something new--but rather a slightly modified *return* to, and acknowledgment of, his original conception; one in which the “three blows of fate narrative” had no place.

Accordingly, in the revised version, only two hammer blows remain because, as de la Grange and others (including this writer) have noted, they serve an active musical, as opposed to merely symbolic, function. They represent a dramatic, developmental event, halting the music’s triumphant progress and knocking it onto another path. All three of the others are jettisoned as musically unnecessary. This procedure typifies Mahler’s tendency on revision to eliminate everything superfluous, and it makes particular sense given the structure of the movement. Even conductors who restore the third hammer blow<sup>1</sup> in the mistaken belief that three, and not five, was Mahler’s original number, have to concede that the rationale for doing so--whether it’s the Biblical number three, Mahler’s superstitious fears, or some such--essentially lies outside the realm of purely musical considerations.

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<sup>1</sup> Something the present edition is quite correct in insisting should never be done without also restoring the original scoring and dynamics of the entire passage.

If this argument is correct, then, it's logical to view the two major components of Mahler's initial revision—changing the number of hammer blows and the order of the inner movements—as part of an attempt to force the music to conform to an external program or narrative that would make it more comprehensible to a contemporary audience, and perhaps to Mahler himself as well, but which was *not* consistent with his original conception. It's a telling example of Mahler's dictum that "One does not compose, one is composed." The creative process follows its own path, with even the composer sometimes left to play catch-up after the fact.

The role of the revised movement order in fitting the symphony into Mahler's evolving programmatic narrative is not difficult to discern. This is his only symphony after the First with an exposition repeat, and the only one (up to this point) originally conceived in four movements. By arranging the first three movements in a more conventional order as Allegro-Andante-Minuet (the latter with its "old fashioned" trio sections), thus emphasizing their independence and "backwardness" rather than their interrelatedness and modernity, Mahler asks the listener to focus on the work's outward homage to the Classical symphonic tradition.

This too constitutes a program, an external reference; one that Mahler might expect a reasonably educated audience of his day to understand and hopefully appreciate. He then offers the "three blows of fate narrative" to explain the finale's deviation from the expected triumphant or happy conclusion. Taken together, Mahler's overall strategy presents the material of the symphony in a more conservative light. We cannot argue, for example, that having aroused certain expectations by adopting a more traditional arrangement of the first three movements, the tragic finale becomes even more shocking by defeating those expectations. This might be the case had Mahler not attempted to explain the presence of the hammer blows programmatically, by reducing their number to three. All of the evidence points to an effort on his part to "de-radicalize" the symphony ahead of its first performances, in turn lending further weight to the idea that the issue of movement order was intimately related to the other changes that Mahler made.

This "double program" theory may sound farfetched or speculative, but let us not forget that it accurately tracks what Mahler actually did, and the order in which he did it. If the theory is weak, it may well be because Mahler's programmatic solution isn't terribly satisfying, as he gradually learned over the symphony's all too brief initial run of performances. However much he may have tried to sweeten the pill, adjusting and arranging the symphony's various components, ultimately the music speaks for itself and defeats any attempt at programmatic rationalization. Hence the removal of the third and final hammer blow, an act which represents not the end of the revision process, but a first step in the gradual rejection and removal of the entire external narrative edifice that Mahler had erected in the months leading up to the premiere. Would the next step have meant restoring the original movement order? We don't know, but it seems that Mahler was heading in that direction.

There is little question, then, that Mahler's handling of the hammer blows shows him gradually returning to his original, non- (or at least differently) programmatic conception of the work alongside his more usual, ongoing process of revision. And if this is true, then it is perfectly reasonable to suggest that the initial movement order also would have represented his "final" and "unequivocal" choice had he been given the time and opportunity to make it, all other factors being equal. Thus, the *full* history of Mahler's work on the Sixth supports returning to his original conception structurally because there can be no doubt, first, that *he really had one*, and second, he evidently realized, or was coming to realize, that the changes he felt compelled to make in order to accommodate the work to the programmatic narrative he concocted later were just not convincing.

Of course, it can be asserted that the issue of the order of the inner movements should be considered separately from Mahler's handling of the hammer blows, and that the two matters are not necessarily related. Although certainly a possibility (the fact that two events happen contemporaneously does not mean that they are interconnected), the likelihood of this being true diminishes dramatically as we consider all of the facts, alongside the various arguments for retaining Mahler's original movement order. The evidence is cumulative. All of the pieces of this particular puzzle need to be assembled in logical sequence. Furthermore, merely pretending that there are no solid musical arguments favoring Mahler's original concept, as the new Critical Edition does, won't make them go away.

### **Argument 5: The Value of Mahler's Intentions in Light of Subsequent Performance History**

Finally, we should remember that even a composer's actions and intentions with regard to his own works cannot and should not always be viewed as dispositive. They are only human; they make mistakes. Musical history is full of cases of composers mutilating their own creations in order to bring them to performance, make them more successful, or adapt them to exigent circumstances. Examples include: the French version of Gluck's *Orfeo*, its second act mangled as arranged for a tenor lead; Schumann's Fourth Symphony, with its patently inferior revised orchestration; and the fussy Vienna version of Bruckner's First Symphony. There is no question that the new finale to Beethoven's Op. 130 String Quartet represents his "final" and "unequivocal" decision. Yet many quartets replace it with the original *Grosse Fuge* without anyone claiming that they are "wrong" to do so.

What is dispositive about the situation with Mahler's Sixth is not, as Kubik and Bruck claim, that most of the lamentably few subsequent performances followed the order Andante/Scherzo. This is only to be expected, since it's what everyone up to that point thought Mahler wanted. No, what remains striking is the fact that from the very first there were those who questioned Mahler's decision, and decided to return to the original movement order regardless. No evidentiary weight can be ascribed to those who followed Mahler's precedent believing that they had no choice

but to respect his wishes irrespective of their own personal feelings. On the other hand, the degree to which the original movement order enjoyed immediate acceptance from the 1960s on, despite the work's well-known prior performance history, suggests that there were musical issues at stake so significant as to supersede even the composer's own performance practice.

This too is a point that deserves to be taken seriously. As de la Grange points out, there have always been some very distinguished voices, including Anton Webern's, who spoke up for the integrity of Mahler's original vision. Hans Redlich, whose Eulenberg Edition of the symphony with much of its original orchestration restored still hasn't been recorded (and surely deserves to be), also offered a strong case for sticking with Mahler's first thoughts structurally. The danger in making the sort of dubious claims to definitiveness that we find in the current edition lies not just in the fact that to do so is simply bad scholarship; it also fails to take into account the practical reality that many busy performers today likely will accept these specious arguments without qualms.

It falls to a Critical Edition, then, to encourage interpreters to come to a work without preconceptions, and to offer a clean text alongside a fair assessment of the various interpretive options that the composer left open to posterity. Just as important as solving the problems that admit of a solution is the need to speak honestly of the questions that must remain unanswered, challenging performers to create their own interpretations within legitimate scholarly and stylistic parameters. In this respect, for all its usefulness in correcting the actual text, the current edition fails in a very significant way. Mahler certainly can be excused for not resolving the structural questions surrounding the order of the inner movements of the Sixth Symphony, but the very organization charged with safeguarding his legacy does not deserve similar indulgence. Clearly, on evidence here, Mahler scholarship has a long way to go before it achieves a balance and intellectual rigor worthy of its subject.

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