Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra Live from Berlin
September 11, 2011
Manfred Honeck, conductor
Mahler, Symphony No. 5
I am pleased to be together with you for the continuation of our “Extraordinary Measures” web broadcast series. I am glad that so many of you joined us for our launch, and I want to extend a special thank you to BNY Mellon, the sponsor of our BNY Mellon Grand Classics series, for their continued support of our Friday night web broadcasts.

I am happy to have this occasion to share with you a special and memorable performance from our 2011 European Festivals Tour of Mahler’s Symphony No. 5, truly a signature piece of the orchestra. This concert was performed and recorded live at the Berlin Philharmonie on September 11, 2011. Following are a few of my own thoughts about the Symphony.

Covers of the tour books from the 2011 European Festivals Tour, which took place from August 23 – September 11, 2011 and included stops in Wiesbaden, Hamburg, Vilnius, Grafenegg, Lucerne, London, Paris, Bonn and Berlin
I still remember my earliest experiences with Mahler’s music as a young man—at the time, I was immediately captivated. Even to this day, my fascination has continued and grown, and this is certainly the case with Mahler’s Fifth Symphony.

You may be interested to know that Mahler struggled to bring the Fifth Symphony to life. It is known that he continuously edited and revised the work, even making changes throughout the orchestral rehearsal period. It is reported that Mahler complained to the legendary Bruno Walter about his own inability in matters of instrumentation. It is not a surprise then that the first version of the Fifth Symphony was criticized as “over-orchestrated,” something that Mahler’s contemporary, Richard Strauss, also noted. Nonetheless, the work received its world premiere in Cologne in October 1904, conducted by Mahler himself.

For me, the Fifth Symphony signifies a true turning point for Mahler. Here, he leaves behind the world of the Wunderhorn songs. And though we still experience marches, waltzes, ländlers and fanfares, all of which are part of the old Austrian tradition that surrounded him, these elements are now presented in a new guise. For example, the third movement Scherzo, the symphony’s centerpiece, has incredible polyphony. It is almost as if Mahler introduces a new musical language with the abundant fugues, imitations, and chorales. Throughout, my challenge is not only to balance and characterize this polyphony in a transparent way, but also to clearly highlight the diverse, contrasting themes.

Conductors are often grateful for Mahler’s extremely precise and numerous, detailed notation in the music. However, it is also possible that some of these markings might lead to misunderstandings. One such example is the famous first triplet upbeat of the trumpet that opens the work. Here, Mahler marks this: “hastily, in the manner of a military fanfare.” This fanfare is nowadays often performed too fast, perhaps an indication that the innate sense of the tradition may no longer be universally understood.
The Fifth Symphony has five clear movements. Mahler himself spoke about organizing the work into three departments—the first and second movements belong together, the third movement stands alone, and then the fourth and fifth movements form the final unit. The musical canvas and emotional scope of the work are enormous.

I. Trauermarsch

The first movement is titled funeral march, an idea that was not necessarily new for Mahler, as his first three symphonies also include funeral marches. We know that as a young child Mahler lived close to military barracks, so undoubtedly heard a lot of fanfares as part of his youth. Another interesting item to consider is the very opening sounds of the movement. Let’s think for a moment of the opening of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony—those famous three short notes followed by a long main note. Here as well, Mahler starts this Symphony with three notes followed by a main note. It is the same motive as Beethoven, but here in the Mahler, it carries a different meaning, now played by the solo trumpet and in the style of a military fanfare. The funeral march eventually gives way to the trio, very passionate and wild, which cries out in outbursts of grief. The trumpet at last calls the movement to a close in total despair.

II. Stürmisch bewegt, mit grösster Vehemenc

The second movement belongs together with the first, but forms the flip side of the coin. It is predominately very stormy and almost savage—as Mahler titles it, “Moving stormily, with greatest vehemence.” The cellos play a wonderful melody, speaking of wild, uncontrolled desperation. Near the end of the movement, the trumpets and trombones begin a noble brass chorale. It is hopeful and glorious, before inexplicably faltering. In this movement, the idea of “ad aspera per aspera” comes to my mind (from darkness to light), and incidentally, this underscores much of Mahler’s music. Though there is a great deal of desperation, there are also moments of lightness and glimpses of paradise.

III. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

As mentioned above, the third movement forms the second department of the three part overall symphonic structure. It is a Scherzo that must be powerful, but not too quick, marked by Mahler as “vigorously, not too fast.” Mahler, in fact, complained ahead of the world premiere that it is always played too quickly, writing to his wife from Cologne, “The scherzo is the very devil of a movement. I see it is in for a peck of troubles! Conductors for the next fifty years will all take it too fast and make nonsense of it; and the public—oh, heavens, what are they to make of this chaos of which new worlds are forever being engendered?”

This movement is a dance and is the longest Scherzo that Mahler has written. It is very deeply in the Austrian tradition of a ländler or country dance and even includes several passages where the strings imitate a zither (i.e., here played pizzicato). The Trio is like a waltz and therefore must evoke the elegance of dancing a waltz. This movement poses certain challenges for the conductor due to the character of the Viennese dance music. It must be played with a lot of rubato (back and forth in the tempo), in order to capture the flavor.

One additional detail to mention is the prominent horn solo which plays a very big role, especially in the transition to the trios. We know that during Mahler’s time, it was not unusual to have the solo horn seated at the front of the stage in order to distinguish this instrument as soloist. Mahler also would ask the solo horn to stand. I, likewise, follow his example, asking our solo horn player, William Caballero, to stand up while playing his solos in this movement.

IV. Adagietto, sehr langsam

While working on the Fifth Symphony, Mahler experienced an incredible period of happiness, both professionally and personally. He famously dedicated the fourth movement Adagietto to his wife Alma. The movement is, in fact, a love poem to Alma—sentimental, emotional and beautiful. It therefore does not express gloomy
sadness, but instead, deeply felt bliss. Here, I choose a quiet and leisurely tempo. An interesting feature of this movement is the chosen instrumentation which stands in direct contrast to the complex surrounding material of the other movements. It is in this movement that Mahler writes only for strings and harp. I see it almost like a dream, enormously beautiful and magical. And while there are fewer notes on the page than the surrounding movements, Mahler is no less precise in notating how they should be played. For example, the first three notes of the opening melody are marked *pianissimo, molto ritardando, espressivo* and *crescendo*. This is a song without words and undoubtedly the most famous passage in all of Mahler’s music. This movement, in fact, figures prominently in Visconti’s film, *Death in Venice*, which brought Mahler and his music to worldwide attention.

**V. Rondo - Finale: Allegro**

A single note from the horn ushers in the last movement, a rondo, which embodies complete joy. It is a radiant and sweeping triumph and whereas the brass chorale from the second movement fell to defeat, here now the brass chorale carries forward to a grand conclusion. It is in this final movement that Mahler incorporates the full range of feelings—freshness and desperation, hell and earth, and dream and reality. Everything come together in this amazing, joyous finale.

It is known that Mahler once shared his wish to conduct his Fifth Symphony 50 years in the future. We now know, more than 100 years later, that orchestral technique and performance culture have developed enormously, and yet, even so, Mahler 5 still poses a lofty challenge to embody the immense spirit and content of this great work.

I invite you now to enjoy our performance of Mahler’s Symphony No. 5, recorded live in September 2011 at the Berlin Philharmonie.
# ORCHESTRA ROSTER

**Mahler, Symphony No. 5 – Recorded September 11, 2011**

**MUSIC DIRECTOR**  
Manfred Honeck  
**ENDOWED BY THE VIRA I. HEINZ ENDOWMENT**

**RESIDENT CONDUCTOR**  
Lawrence Loh  
**VIRGINIA KAUFMAN RESIDENT CONDUCTOR CHAIR**

**FIRST VIOLIN**  
Tomo Keller  
**GUEST CONCERTMASTER**

**SECOND VIOLIN**  
Jennifer Ross  
**G. CHRISTIAN LANTZSCH & DUQUESNE LIGHT COMPANY CHAIR**

**CELLO**  
Anne Martindale Williams  
**PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ASSOCIATION CHAIR**

**HARP**  
Gretchen Van Hoesen  
**VIRGINIA CAMPBELL CHAIR**

**BASSOON**  
Nancy Goeres  
**MR. & MRS. WILLIAM GENGE AND MR. & MRS. JAMES E. LEE CHAIR**

**TROMBONE**  
Peter Sullivan  
**TOM & JAMEE TODD CHAIR**

**PITTSBURGH SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

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**ORCHESTRA ROSTER**

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<tr>
<td>Music Director</td>
<td>Manfred Honeck</td>
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<td>Resident Conductor</td>
<td>Lawrence Loh</td>
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**First Violin**
- Tomo Keller

**Second Violin**
- Jennifer Ross
- G. Christian Lantzsch & Duquesne Light Company Chair

**Cello**
- Anne Martindale Williams
- Pittsburgh Symphony Association Chair

**Harp**
- Gretchen Van Hoesen
- Virginia Campbell Chair

**Bassoon**
- Nancy Goeres
- Mr. & Mrs. William Genge and Mr. & Mrs. James E. Lee Chair

**Trombone**
- Peter Sullivan
- Tom & Jamee Todd Chair

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