

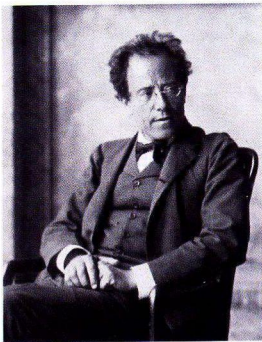
Gustav Mahler: 3rd Symphony

TRANSCRIBED & PLAYED BY

DAVID BRIGGS

Chestnut Music CD 010

Live in Concert



The symphony, particularly due to the extensive number of movements and their marked differences in character and construction, is a unique work. The opening movement, colossal in its conception (much like the symphony itself), roughly takes the shape of sonata form, insofar as there is an alternating presentation of two theme groups; however, the themes are varied and developed with each presentation, and the typical harmonic logic of the sonata form movement—particularly the tonic statement of second theme group material in the recapitulation—is

changed. The opening gathers itself slowly into a rousing orchestral march. A solo tenor trombone passage states a bold (secondary) melody that is developed and transformed in its recurrences. At the apparent conclusion of the development, several solo snare drums play a rhythmic passage lasting about thirty seconds and the opening passage by eight horns is repeated almost exactly.

Mahler dedicated the second movement to “the flowers on the meadow.” In contrast to the violent forces of the first movement, it starts as a graceful Menuet, but also features stormier episodes.

The third movement, a scherzo, with alternating sections in 2/4 and 6/8 metre, quotes extensively from Mahler’s early song “Ablösung im Sommer” (Relief in Summer). In the trio section, the complete mood changes from playful to

contemplative occurs with an off-stage post horn (or flugelhorn) solo. The reprise of the scherzo music is unusual, as it is interrupted several times by the post-horn melody.

At this point, in the sparsely instrumentated fourth movement, we hear an alto solo singing a setting of Friedrich Nietzsche's "Midnight Song" from *Also sprach Zarathustra* ("O Mensch! Gib acht!" ("O man! Take heed!")), with thematic material from the first movement woven into it.

The cheerful fifth movement, "Es sungen drei Engel", is one of Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* songs, (whose text itself is loosely based on a 17th century church hymn, which Paul Hindemith later used in its original form in his *Symphony "Mathis der Maler"*) about the redemption of sins and comfort in belief.

Of the great finale, Bruno Walter wrote, "In the last movement, words are stilled—for what language can utter heavenly love more powerfully and forcefully than music itself? The *Adagio*, with its broad, solemn melodic line, is, as a whole—and despite passages of burning pain—eloquent of comfort and grace. It is a single sound of heartfelt and exalted feelings, in which the whole giant structure finds its culmination." The movement begins very softly with a broad D-major chorale melody, which slowly builds to a loud and majestic conclusion culminating on repeated D major chords with bold statements on the timpani.

Symphony text: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_\(Mahler\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._3_(Mahler))

St Katharine's Church, Oppenheim - Specification of the Woehl Organ

I. Manual

Great

Principal 16

+ Bordun* 16

Principal 8

+ Rohrflöte 8

Flüte harmonique 8

+ Gambe 8

Octave 4

+ Gemshorn 4

+ Quinte 2 2/3

Octave 2

+ Cornett 4-6fach

Mixtur 6fach 2

Trompete 16

Trompette 8

II. Manual

Swell

+ Gedeckt 16

+ Principal 8

+ Salicional 8

Unda maris 8

Doppelflöte 8

+ Gedeckt 8

+ Octave 4

+ Flöte 4

Nasard 2 2/3

+ Octave 2

Terz 1/3/5

Mixtur 4-5f 2

+ Trompete 8

Clarinette 8

Tremulant

III. Manual

Récit

Quintaton 16

Flûte traversière 8

Cor de nuit 8

Viola de Gambe 8

Voix céleste 8

+ Fugara 4

Flûte octaviante 4

Octavin 2

Bombarde 16

Trompette harmonique 8

Clairon harmonique 4

Basson Hautbois 8

Voix humaine 8

Tremulant

Pedal

Groß-Untersatz 32

Grand Bourdon 32

Principal 16

+ Kontrabass 16

Violon 16

+ Subbass 16

+ Gedecktbass 16

Octavbass 8

Violoncello 8

Bassflöte 8

Flöte 4

+ Posaune 16

Basstrompete 8

Bombarde 16

Trompette 8

Clairon 4

Couplers
II-I
III-I
I bass octave coupler
III-I bass octave coupler
III-II
III-II bass octave coupler
III bass octave coupler
I-P
II-P
III-P
III-P discant octave coupler

- Manual range: C-a3, Pedal C-f1
- Mechanical key action, mechanical coupler
- Electronic stop action and combination action
- Symphonic wind system, divided twice within range of the keyboard per division, stronger wind in the discant, melody emphasized, switchable to classical wind
- Stops from the manuals I and II can be played for more nuanced tonal variation also in the pedal.
- By opening of flaps, the instrument can also be played for the West choir.

+ *Stop by Walcker (1871)*

* *Stop by Walcker, will be restored and installed into another phase of construction*

Speilhilfen

Walze ON

Classical Wind On

West Organ ON

Jalousietritt Fernwerk

COLOUR & INTEGRITY:

transcribing orchestral works

By David Briggs from **Choir & Organ** March/April 2013

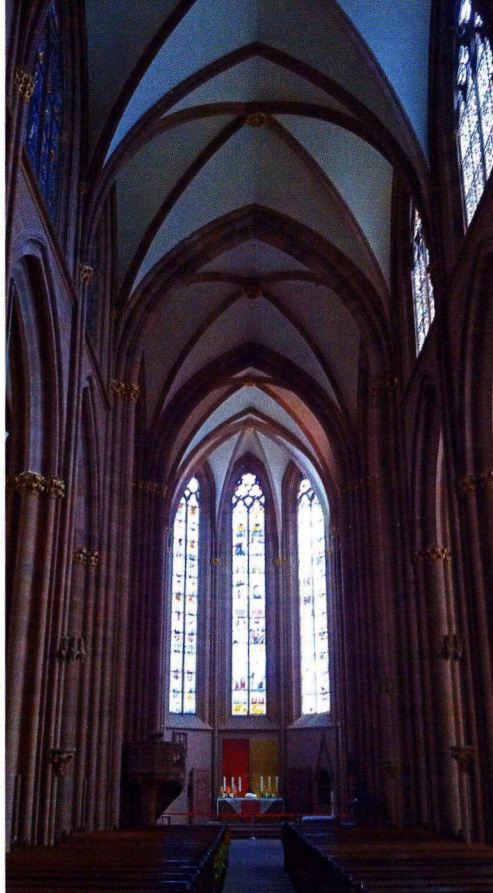
I'm occasionally asked, due to a slight similarity of appearance, if I share any DNA with Gustav Mahler. I think that is perhaps just a trifle farfetched, but my own undying love of Mahler's music began as a tender 14-year old viola player in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain. Under the inspired and experienced guidance of the late Sir Charles Groves, getting to know the extraordinary Fifth Symphony from the inside out was a profound and life-changing experience. I became immediately addicted to the unique harmonic language, the larger-than-life orchestration and, above all, the intense emotional impact of this music. I will never forget the sheer voluminous beauty of the enormous NYO string section (which boasted, if my memory serves me correctly, 20 violas!) playing the famous *Adagietto*, accompanied by three sonorous harps. Sitting in the middle of this colossal pianissimo, created by so many brilliant and idealistic musicians was an experience equalled only by playing the organ in Notre-Dame de Paris for the first time in 1984 (although at the other end of the sonic spectrum).

In 1998 I made a transcription of the Fifth Symphony, and premiered it at the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival that August. On 1 April I had recorded the transcription for Priory Records and this disc later apparently became one of Priory's best-selling organ CDs (interestingly with particularly high sales in Japan). Eight years later I made a transcription of the Sixth Symphony as a 50th birthday present for my wife, Madge, who had introduced me to the great recording with the CBSO under Sir Simon Rattle early on in our courtship back in 2003. In 2008 I made a transcription of the Third Symphony and premiered this at a concert at St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh that summer. Most recently I have been engaged on a transcription of the Second Symphony (the 'Resurrection'), which will receive its premiere at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City in April 2013, with eight further performances scheduled in Germany, UK and USA.

Certain well-known commentators in the organ world sometimes get quite snooty about transcriptions. When I premiered my Mahler 5 transcription at the 1998 Three Choirs, an extremely well-respected music critic cajoled me (albeit with great humour) about the ethical ineptitudes of playing orchestral symphonies on the organ: 'It's only a transcription - that's what we've been trying to get away from for decades,' he asserted.

What would Gustav Mahler think? is a question I often ask myself. Of course we cannot ask him, but my hunch is that he would most likely approve. Mahler himself was a highly pragmatic, self-driven musician who was often making

arrangements and revisions of both his own and other composers' music. Listening to Mahler playing the first movement of the Fifth Symphony on the Welte-Mignon piano rolls is a humbling and intriguing experience, on a number of levels. He was patently an extraordinary pianist. His approach to rhythm is quite different to what we have come to expect from contemporary performance: each bar varies subtly in tempo and accentuation, but it never sounds 'out of time.' The texture is changed completely (improvised?) in order to make the music effective in its new guise, that is, as a solo piano piece. In short, Mahler was recreating his own music, and clearly rather enjoying so.

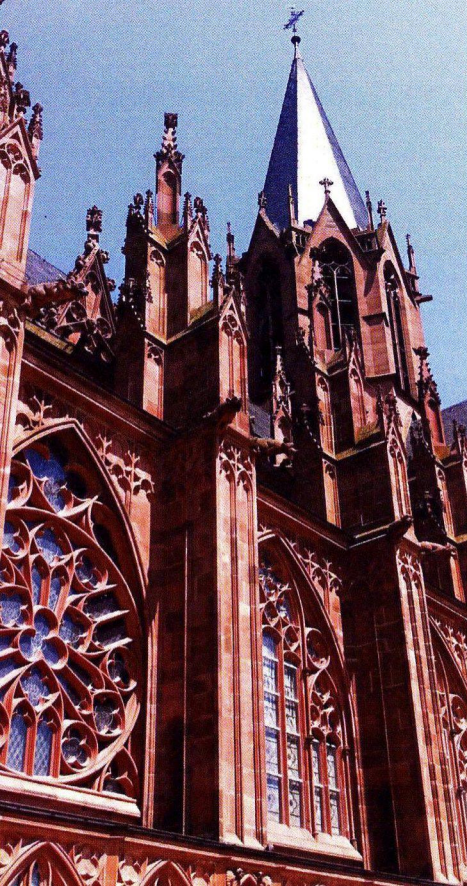


For many centuries composers have transcribed and re-arranged music. Think, for instance, of the great J.S. Bach – wouldn't it be intriguing to know what he would have had on his iPod? I suspect Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico*, maybe de Grigny's *Première livre d'orgue* (which he is known to have copied), and certainly Dietrich Buxtehude's complete *Improvisations* as a download. Had Bach had an iPhone, he would certainly have had the timetables for Air Leipzig, and of course his own website J.S.Bach.com, where you could download all the most recent cantatas for 100 euros each, available as a PDF or on Sibelius, in any key in any language.

My point, of course, is that Bach, as well as being a genius with a unique hotline to his creator, was above all a practical and practising musician and was always making transcriptions of his as well as other composers' music. The six *Schübler Chorales* from 1746 are all from pre-existing cantata movements and we know that movements from cantatas and other previously composed works were reused in all three Passions as well as the B minor Mass. He transcribed four of Vivaldi's violin concertos as solo organ pieces. So Bach was the master of the art of transcription, making the piece in question successful and idiomatic in its new guise. This remains the central and imperative crux of any transcription – that it has to be reinvented and not just copied, and the link between the art of improvisation and transcription is an interesting one to probe. My own feeling is that intrinsically great music can cross instrumental boundaries with compelling ease – think of the great pianist Earl Wild and his fabulous transcriptions of Rachmaninoff songs. The main component is that the performance in the new medium has sufficient integrity and colour.

My own first major orchestral transcription for organ was *Tod und Verklärung* of Richard Strauss, which I made in 1992 when I was organist at Truro Cathedral, where it sounded fantastic on the famous Father Willis organ. Strauss wrote for the organ very infrequently and this is a great loss – perhaps his significant agnosticism contributed largely to this. Then came Maurice Ravel, and the wondrous Second Orchestral Suite from *Daphnis et Chloé* (which I'd also known as a viola player in the NYO). Sadly, neither Debussy nor Ravel wrote for the organ, although there is just one student piece by Debussy (a fugue written when he was 16, and hardly recognisable as his style). This may be because at the beginning of the century organs were nowhere near as flexible in registrational control as we have now – of course, colour is everything for both these composers and they had the orchestra.

Several important ingredients go into both the making and the performance of successful organ transcriptions. I always start from the full orchestral score and not a piano reduction. It's perhaps surprising that, with Mahler's symphonies, it's not necessary to reduce too much, or to leave too much out. If you look at the sketches, things are often quite clear (and written for piano over three staves). The magic with Mahler comes, of course, from the subtlety of the orchestral colour, but with modern organ console technology and a degree of imagination it's possible to replicate (or more accurately translate) this in a new medium. It's important, too, not to make the transcription unplayable. Anything that has too many notes loses its effectiveness, and the art of knowing what to leave out is core to the technique. I tend to find ways, through octave



transpositions, reorganising of the voicing of the harmony, and so on, to make the music lie well under the hands and both feet. Processing each note is a very time-consuming (and rather therapeutic) exercise – each bar requires a large amount of thought and this is a perfect way to get to know a score very intimately. The organist, of course, has four main advantages over the pianist, when it comes to performing orchestral transcriptions: (a) the ability to incorporate either single or double pedal parts; (b) more expressive potential through registrational colour and swell boxes; (c) more possibility for sustaining intense orchestral crescendi; and (d) very often performing in great cathedrals, where the acoustic and aesthetic ambience can add so much to the emotional impact of this music.

Playing the last movement of Mahler 3 at York Minster a while back, the effect of that matchless building on the music was breathtaking.

In making the transcriptions, I'm quite disciplined about including the composers' original intentions for phrasing, articulations and dynamic parameters. More than that, though, I leave to the integrity and free will of the performer. As with the performance of repertoire, it's always the organist's job to recreate his interpretation with each instrument he comes across - this voyage of discovery is what makes giving organ concerts a lot of fun. From the performance point of view, I always endeavour to adopt a registration scheme that has as much colour and vivacity as the orchestra, but not necessarily the same explicit colours. There are certain instruments we just don't have, but I think with care it's possible to create registrations which have the same emotional ambience, clarity and contrast. Perhaps the most important thing is to be as compelling as possible in your musical vision, in each bar and, of course, that the control of the instrument should be streamlined and as seamless as possible. You try and imagine what Mahler would say if he were standing over your shoulder.

My profound hope is that people will enjoy playing and hearing these recastings of Mahler's originals, rather like seeing great paintings in a new art gallery, in a different frame under completely new lighting conditions. This is highly charged, emotional music that shows Mahler's complete genius for creating a highly original soundscape, which is instantly recognisable and completely inimitable.



David Briggs

David Briggs is an internationally renowned organist whose performances are acclaimed for their musicality, virtuosity, and ability to excite and engage audiences of all ages. With an extensive repertoire spanning five centuries, he is known across the globe for his brilliant organ transcriptions of symphonic music by composers such as Mahler, Schubert, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Bruckner, Ravel, and Bach. Fascinated by the art of Improvisation since a child, David also frequently

performs improvisations to silent films such as *Phantom of the Opera*, *Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, *Nosferatu*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Metropolis*, as well as a variety of Charlie Chaplin films.

At the age of 17, David obtained his FRCO (Fellow of the Royal College of Organists) diploma, winning all the prizes and the Silver Medal of the Worshipful Company of Musicians. From 1981-84 he was the Organ Scholar at King's College, Cambridge University, during which time he studied organ with Jean Langlais in Paris. The first British winner of the Tournemire Prize at the St Albans International Improvisation Competition, he also won the first prize in the International Improvisation Competition at Paisley.

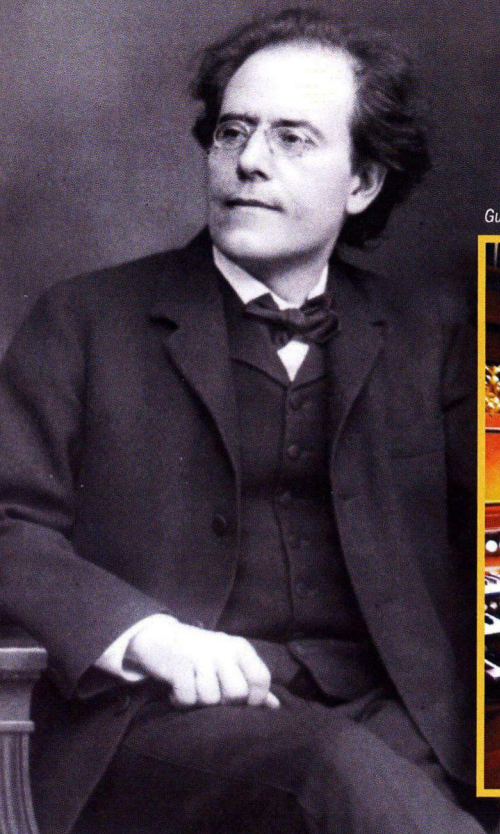
Subsequently David held positions at Hereford, Truro and Gloucester Cathedrals. He is currently Artist-in-Residence at St James Cathedral, Toronto.

David's schedule includes more than 60 concerts a year, spanning several continents. Deeply committed to making organ music vibrant for future generations, he enjoys giving pre-concert lectures designed to make organ music more accessible to audiences. In addition, he teaches at Cambridge (UK), frequently serves on international organ competition juries, and gives masterclasses at colleges and conservatories across the U.S. and Europe.

David Briggs is also a prolific composer and his works range from full scale oratorios to works for solo instruments. He has recorded a DVD, and 30 CDs, many of which include his own compositions and transcriptions. For more information,

Please visit: www.david-briggs.org.





Gustav Mahler, c1909

David Briggs, 2011

