

# GUSTAV MAHLER (1860 – 1911)

## SYMPHONY NO. 2, AUFERSTEHUNG (“Resurrection”)

1. Allegro Maestoso. Mit Durchaus Ernstem Und Feierlichem Ausdruck
2. Andante Moderato. Sehr Gemächlich
3. In ruhig fliessender Bewegung
4. Urlicht
5. In Tempo des Scherzos
6. “Aufersteh’n, ja aufersteh’n wirst du, mein Staub, nach kurzer Ruh!”

### HOUSTON SYMPHONY CHORUS

Charles Hausmann & Hyeok Lee, chorus preparation

CYNTHIA CLAYTON, soprano; MELANIE SONNENBERG, mezzo-soprano

### TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

FRANZ ANTON KRAGER, conductor

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# MAHLER

## SYMPHONY NO. 2

### “RESURRECTION”



### HOUSTON SYMPHONY CHORUS

CYNTHIA CLAYTON, SOPRANO; MELANIE SONNENBERG, MEZZO-SOPRANO

TEXAS MUSIC FESTIVAL ORCHESTRA

FRANZ ANTON KRAGER, CONDUCTOR

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The Symphony No. 2 by Gustav Mahler, known as the Resurrection Symphony, was first performed in 1888 and 1889, and first performed in 1895. Apart from the Eighth Symphony, this symphony was Mahler's most popular and successful work during his lifetime. It was his first major work that established his lifelong view of the beauty of afterlife and resurrection. The work lasts around eighty to ninety minutes and is conventionally labeled as being in the key of C minor; however, the New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians labels the work's tonality as "c - E", which acknowledges the work's triumphant E-flat major ending.

Mahler completed what would become the first movement of the symphony in 1888 as a single-movement symphonic poem called Totenfeier (Funeral Rites). Some sketches for the second movement also date from that year. Mahler wavered five years on whether to make Totenfeier the opening movement of a symphony, although his manuscript does label it as a symphony. In 1893, he composed the second and third movements. The finale remained a problem. While thoroughly aware he was inviting comparison with Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 – both symphonies use a chorus as the centerpiece of a final movement that begins with references to and is much longer than the movements preceding it – Mahler knew he wanted a vocal final movement. Finding the right text for this movement proved long and perplexing.

When Mahler took up his appointment at the Hamburg Opera in 1891, he found the other important conductor there to be Hans von Bülow, who was in charge of the city's symphony concerts. Bülow, not known for his generosity, was impressed by Mahler. Bülow's death in 1894 greatly affected Mahler. At the funeral, Mahler heard a setting of Friedrich Klopstock's Die Auferstehung (The Resurrection), where the verse calls out "Rise again, yes, you shall rise again, my dust." "It struck me like lightning, this thing," Mahler wrote to conductor Anton Seidl, "and everything was revealed to me clear and plain." Mahler used the first two verses of Klopstock's hymn, then added verses of his own that dealt more explicitly with redemption and resurrection. He completed the finale and revised the orchestration of the first movement in 1894, then inserted the song Urlicht (Primal Light) as the penultimate movement.

Mahler initially devised a narrative program for the work, which he shared with a number of friends. He even had one of these versions printed in the program book at the premiere in Dresden on 20 December 1901. In this program, the first movement represents a funeral and asks questions such as "Is there life after death?"; the second movement is a remembrance of happy times in the life of the deceased; the third movement represents a view of life as meaningless activity; the fourth movement is a wish for release from life without meaning; and the fifth movement – after a return of the doubts of the third movement and the questions of the first – ends with a fervent hope for everlasting, transcendent renewal. As generally happened with other works, Mahler later withdrew all versions of the program from circulation.

1. *Allegro maestoso. Mit durchaus ernstem und feierlichem Ausdruck* (With complete gravity and solemnity of expression) The first movement – written in C minor – though passing through a number of different moods, resembles a funeral march. The movement's formal structure is modified sonata form. The exposition is repeated in a varied form, as Beethoven often did in his late String Quartets. The development presents several ideas that will be used later in the symphony, including a theme based on the Dies Irae plainchant.

2. *Andante moderato. Sehr gemächlich. Nie eilen.* (Very leisurely. Never rush.) The second movement is a delicate Ländler, or Austrian country dance, in A-flat major with two contrasting sections of slightly darker music. This slow movement itself is contrasting to the two adjacent movements. Structurally, it is one of the simplest movements in Mahler's whole output. It is the remembrance of the joyful times in the life of the deceased.



3. *In ruhig fließender Bewegung* (With quietly flowing movement) The third movement is a scherzo in C minor. It opens with two strong, short timpani strokes. It is followed by two softer strokes, and then followed by even softer strokes that provide the tempo to this movement, which includes references to Jewish folk music. Mahler called the climax of the movement, which occurs near the end, sometimes a "cry of despair", and sometimes a "death-shriek". The main melody is based on Mahler's setting of "Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt" (St. Anthony of Padua's Sermon to the Fishes) from "The Youth's Magic Horn", which Mahler composed almost concurrently.

4. *Urlicht* (Primeval Light). *Sehr feierlich, aber schlicht* (Very solemn, but simple) The fourth movement, Urlicht, is likewise a song from "The Youth's Magic Horn", sung by an alto, which serves as a brief introduction to the Finale. The song, set in the remote key of D-flat major, illustrates the longing for relief from worldly woes, leading without a break to the fortissimo outbreak of the Finale.

5. *Im Tempo des Scherzos* (In the tempo of the scherzo) The finale is the longest movement, typically lasting well over half an hour. It is divided into two large parts, the second of which begins with the entry of the chorus and whose form is governed by the text of this movement.

The first part is instrumental, containing a wide variety of moods, tempi and keys, with much of the material based on what has been heard in the previous movements. The movement opens with a long introduction, beginning with the fff "cry of despair" that was the climax of the third movement, followed by the quiet presentation of a theme which re-appears as structural music in the choral section, and by a call in the offstage horns. The first theme group reiterates the "Dies Irae" theme from the first movement, and then introduces the "resurrection" theme to which the chorus will sing their first words, and finally a fanfare. This long opening section serves to introduce a number of themes, which will become important in the choral part of the finale.

The development section is what Mahler calls the "march of the dead". It begins with two long drum rolls, which include the use of the gongs. In addition to developing the Dies Irae and resurrection themes and motives from the opening cry of despair, this section also states, episodically, a number of other themes, based on earlier material. The orchestral recitative is fully recapitulated, and is accompanied this time by offstage interruptions from a "military" band of brass and percussion. This builds to a climax, which leads into a re-statement of the opening introductory section. The horn call is expanded into Mahler's "Great Summons", a transition into the choral section. The Epiphany comes in, played by the flute, in a high register, and featuring trumpets, that play offstage. The choral section comes in pianissimo a little past the halfway point of the movement. (The B-flat below the bass clef occurs four times in the choral bass part: three at the chorus' hushed entrance and again on the words "Hör auf zu beben". It is the lowest vocal note in standard classical repertoire.)

The goal of the symphony, E-flat major, the relative major of the opening C minor, is achieved with the text "Sterben werd' ich um zu leben," with the entrance of the heretofore silent pipe organ (marked "volles Werk") and with the choir instructed to sing "mit höchster Kraft" (with highest power). The instrumental coda is in this ultimate key as well, and is accompanied by the tolling of deep bells. Mahler went so far as to purchase actual church bells for performances, finding all other means of achieving this sound unsatisfactory. In this performance, the TMF Orchestra uses actual church bells borrowed from the Houston Symphony's percussion department. Mahler wrote of this movement: "The increasing tension, working up to the final climax, is so tremendous that I don't know myself, now that it is over, how I ever came to write it."

