

Kiril Petrovich Kondrashin was internationally the best-known conductor of the Soviet Union and also the most prominent one to emigrate from that country. He was known for vigorous and solid performances of a wide repertory, particularly the Russian masters.

He was brought up with music, as his family included several orchestral musicians. He took piano lessons, and the family got him lessons in musical theory at the Musical Teknikum with Nikolai Zhilyayev, who had a strong influence on him. While still a student, he made his conducting debut in 1931 at the Children's Theater. He entered the Moscow Conservatory in 1934, where he studied conducting with Boris Khaikin. He graduated in 1936, but by then had obtained a job as assistant conductor at the Nemirovich-Danchenko Music Theater in 1934, debuting with the operetta *Les cloches de Corneville* by Planquette.

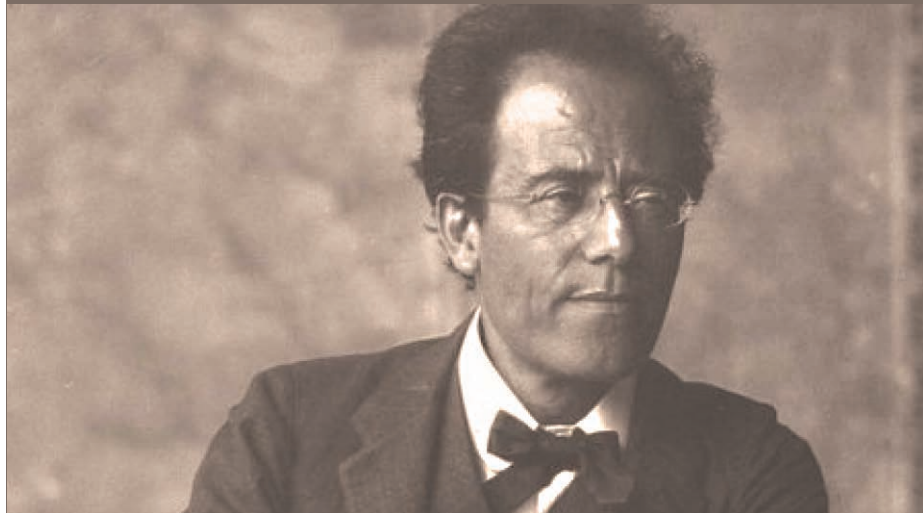
In 1936 he was conductor at the Maly Opera Theater in Leningrad, retaining that post until 1943. Along with other artists who were deemed important to the war effort, he was evacuated from besieged Leningrad after the German invasion of Russia. In 1943, he became a member of the conducting staff of the Moscow Bolshoi Theater, which was also in a wartime home outside the capital. He remained with the Bolshoi until 1956, making marked improvement in his interpretation.

Meanwhile, a demand was building for him as a concert conductor. He received Stalin Prizes in 1948 and 1949. When he left the Bolshoi, it was with the intention of centering his career on the podium rather than in the pit. His fame grew greatly in 1958, when he led the orchestra in the prizewinning appearances of American pianist Van Cliburn at the Tchaikovsky International Competition. Cliburn charmed both his home country and his Russian hosts, and the resulting LP record of the Tchaikovsky First Piano Concerto, conducted by Kondrashin, was a long-time best seller. This led to his American and British debuts, making Kondrashin the first Soviet conductor to appear in the U.S.

In 1960 he was named artistic director of the Moscow Philharmonic, and as such participated in another piano concerto blockbuster recording with a U.S. piano star, the great Prokofiev Third Concerto recording for Mercury with Byron Janis, still considered by many the greatest interpretation of that brilliant work on disc. Kondrashin's performances were bright and dramatic, tending to programmatic interpretations that commentators saw as the legacy of his theater career. He was the U.S.S.R.'s finest interpreter of Mahler, leading all the symphonies with unusual restraint and with the expressive and dramatic qualities of the music seemingly enhanced by understatement.

He left the Moscow Philharmonic in 1975, turning to guest conducting. As a result of high demand outside the U.S.S.R., he decided to emigrate in 1978. He was named permanent conductor of the Amsterdam Concertgebouw in 1979, and immediately began making a notable series of recordings with them, but died in that city only two years later.

## Mahler Symphony No. 9 In D Major



**Kiril Kondrashin**  
**Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra**

Where *Das Lied von der Erde* ended with gentle resignation, here Mahler attacks death head-on with music of profound violence and irony. The grim character of the music, certain cryptic phrases Mahler marked into the drafts of the symphony, and the recurring use of an unusual motive and chord progression from Beethoven's "Les adieux" Sonata, Op. 81, have led commentators to believe that this symphony is autobiographical, a kind of "farewell" symphony. Since Mahler immediately proceeded to the composition of his Tenth Symphony, though, this interpretation is without real merit. It seems sufficient to accept that death, once again, is simply an obsessive theme. Musically, what is new in this symphony is a synthesis of the sharp-edged style of the Sixth and Seventh with the rarefied, contrapuntal technique of *Das Lied*. Combined with Mahler's increasingly advanced harmony and sophisticated thematic development, the result is music that is more closely allied with the expressionism of Schoenberg than with Mahler's earlier romanticism. At times it approaches a complete collapse of tonality, blurring traditional thematic and tonal differentiations in a totally modernistic way. *Andante comodo* (Moving.) This powerful and devastating movement begins innocently enough with gentle figures in the strings, harp, and horns and expands into a beautifully resigned, sighing theme. Soon it is interrupted by a chromatic and despairing theme. These two ideas alternate in various forms, rising to several great climaxes. The movement culminates in a complete transfiguration of the opening motives into a nearly cacophonous collapse. It never recovers as solo instruments seem to wander aimlessly before the final resignation of

the coda.

*Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers.* (In a leisurely Ländler Tempo.) This dance movement alternates a quirky and awkward Ländler devoid of charm with a tawdry Waltz, clearly meant to evoke cheap, popular styles as a metaphor for the pointlessness of life. These two ideas intermingle in increasingly complex ways, only interrupted once by a more gentle, nostalgic Trio. *Rondo. Burleske. Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig.* (Very fast and defiantly.) This is ostensibly a Scherzo, but has the proportions and weight of a Finale. It is also Mahler's most modern movement, consisting of intensely complex and dissonant linear counterpoint. There are alternations with some grotesque band music, but these only add to the insanely off-balance and violently ferocious general style. This wild pandemonium is interrupted suddenly by a transcendent section reminiscent of the beginning of the symphony. It slowly expands into a passionate melody for the strings before finally returning to the diabolical. The ending is defiant and grim. *Adagio. Sehr Langsam und noch zurückhaltend.* (Very slow yet still held back.) The violence of the preceding movement is transformed into a calm, if bitter, acceptance. A hymn-like passage of stately character seems to express Mahler's deepest yearnings. This alternates with a somewhat spare, rarefied section in barest counterpoint that seems to express emotional exhaustion. A big and tragic climax, highlighted by a fanfare transfigured from the first movement leads to the resigned and quiet coda.

# Mahler Symphony No. 9 In D Major

**Kiril Kondrashin**

**Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra**

1. Andante Comodo 24:48
  2. Im Tempo Eines Gemächlichen Ländler.  
Etwas Täppisch Und Sehr Derb - Poco Più Mosso 15:27
  3. Rondo. Burleske (Allegro Assai. Sehr Trotzig - Presto) 11:54
  4. Adagio (Sehr Langsam) 21:51
- Total Time: 1:14:00

Recording Info: Recorded by Meloydia 1964  
Transferred from a 15ips two track tape



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