

Fritz Reiner was one of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century -- noted for the vast range of his repertoire, which included both symphonic and operatic pieces spanning from the traditional canon to contemporary material, he was also an influential educator who counted among his pupils Leonard Bernstein. Reiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on December 19, 1888; despite earning a law degree from the University of Bucharest, he pursued a career in music, and at age 21 was named chorusmaster of the Budapest Opera. A stint as conductor with the Budapest Volksoper followed before Reiner was chosen in 1914 to serve as principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden, where he collaborated with Richard Strauss on productions of several of the composer's early operas.

In 1922 Reiner left Europe to relocate to America, settling in Cincinnati, OH, and signing on as conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a decade later he was tapped to head the orchestral and opera departments at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where his students included Bernstein. After next serving as the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony between 1938 and 1948, he served five years with the Metropolitan Opera. While Reiner's frequent migration might have been attributed largely to a restless creativity, he was also a notoriously difficult personality who frequently alienated those around him -- many of the musicians under his command openly loathed him, although he inevitably inspired the best work of their careers.

Reiner's own best work was undoubtedly his tenure with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he elevated into one of the most celebrated ensembles in the world. Moving over to the CSO in 1953, he not only established the orchestra as a top-flight live attraction but also as a popular recording entity -- the countless albums they made for RCA's Living Stereo series during Reiner's decade-long tenure were much acclaimed by collectors for both the power of the performances and the unusually high fidelity of the recordings themselves. Releases like Fritz Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss and Fritz Reiner Conducts Bartók in particular remain definitive interpretations of the composers in question. Health problems forced Reiner to resign his position in 1962, and he died in New York City on November 15 of the following year.



MAHLER

THE SONG OF THE EARTH

DAS LIED VON DER ERDE

REINER
CHICAGO SYMPHONY
MAUREN FORRESTER
RICHARD LEWIS



Das Lied von der Erde ("The Song of the Earth") is a composition for two voices and orchestra written by the Austrian composer Gustav Mahler between 1908 and 1909. Described as a symphony when published, it comprises six songs for two singers who alternate movements. Mahler specified that the two singers should be a tenor and an alto, or else a tenor and a baritone if an alto is not available. Mahler composed this work following the most painful period in his life, and the songs address themes such as those of living, parting and salvation. On the centenary of Mahler's birth, the composer and prominent Mahler conductor Leonard Bernstein described Das Lied von der Erde as Mahler's "greatest symphony".

Three disasters befell Mahler during the summer of 1907. Political maneuvering and antisemitism forced him to resign as Director of the Vienna Court Opera, his eldest daughter Maria died from scarlet fever and diphtheria, and Mahler himself was diagnosed with a congenital heart defect. "With one stroke," he wrote to his friend Bruno Walter, "I have lost everything I have gained in terms of who I thought I was, and have to learn my first steps again like a newborn".

The same year saw the publication of Hans Bethge's Die chinesische Flöte, a volume of ancient Chinese poetry rendered into German. Mahler was captivated by the vision of earthly beauty and transience expressed in these verses and chose seven of the poems to set to music as Das Lied von der Erde. Mahler completed the work in 1909.

Mahler was aware of the so-called "curse of the ninth", a superstition arising from the fact that no major composer since Beethoven had successfully completed more than nine symphonies: he had already written eight symphonies before composing Das Lied von der Erde. Fearing his subsequent demise, he decided to subtitle the work A Symphony for Tenor, Alto (or Baritone) Voice and Orchestra, rather than numbering it as a symphony. His next symphony, written for purely instrumental forces, was numbered his Ninth. That was indeed the last symphony he fully completed, because only two movements of the Tenth had been fully orchestrated at the time of his death.

The first public performance was given, posthumously, on 20 November 1911 in the Tonhalle in Munich, sung by Sara Cahier and William Miller (both Americans) with Bruno Walter conducting. Mahler had died six months earlier, on 18 May.

One of the earliest performances in London (possibly the first) occurred in January 1913 at the Queen's Hall under conductor Henry Wood, where it was sung by Gervase Elwes and Doris Woodall. Wood reportedly thought that the work was 'excessively modern but very beautiful.

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- Das Lied Von Der Erde / The Song Of The Earth
- 1 Das Trinklied Vom Jammer Der Erde
The Drinking Song Of Earth's Sorrow 8:36
- 2 Der Einsame Im Herbst
Autumn Loneliness 10:11
- 3 Von Der Jugend
Of Youth 3:22
- 4 Von Der Schönheit
Of Beauty 6:43
- 5 Der Trunkene Im Frühling
Wine In Spring 4:29
- 6 Der Abschied
The Farewell 29:48

Recorded by RCA November 7 & 9, 1959.
Producer – Richard Mohr Engineer – Lewis Layton



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