

The Boston Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1881 by Henry Lee Higginson. Its first conductor was George Henschel, who was a noted baritone as well as conductor, and a close friend of Johannes Brahms. For the orchestra, Henschel devised innovative orchestral seating charts and sent them to Brahms, who replied approvingly and commented on the issues raised by horn and viola sections in a letter of mid-November 1881 .

The orchestra's four subsequent music directors were all trained in Austria, including the seminal and highly influential Hungarian-born conductor Arthur Nikisch, in accordance with the tastes of Higginson. Wilhelm Gericke served twice, from 1884 to 1889 and again from 1898, to 1906. According to Joseph Horowitz's review of correspondence, Higginson considered 25 candidates to replace Gericke after receiving notice in 1905. He decided not to offer the position to Gustav Mahler, Fritz Steinbach, and Willem Mengelberg but did not rule out the young Bruno Walter if nobody more senior were to accept. He offered the position to Hans Richter in February, 1905, who declined, to Felix Mottl in November, who was previously engaged, and then to previous director Nikisch, who declined; the post was finally offered to Karl Muck, who accepted and began his duties in October, 1906. He was conductor until 1908 and again from 1912-1918.

The music director 1908-12 was Max Fiedler. He conducted the premiere of Ignacy Jan Paderewski's Symphony in B minor "Polonia" in 1909.

During World War I, Muck (born in Germany but a Swiss citizen since childhood), was arrested, shortly before a performance of the St. Matthew Passion in 1918, and interned in a prison camp without trial or charge until the end of the war, when he was deported. He vowed never to return, and conducted thereafter only in Europe. Its next two music directors were French: Henri Rabaud, who took over from Muck for a season, and then Pierre Monteux from 1919 to 1924. Monteux, because of a musician's strike, was able to replace 30 players, thus changing the orchestra's sound; the orchestra developed a reputation for a "French" sound which persists to some degree to this day.

Alsatian maestro Charles Munch had made his conducting debut in Boston in 1946. He led orchestra on its first overseas tour, and also produced their first stereo recording in February 1954 for RCA Victor. In 1952, Munch appointed the first woman to hold a principal chair in a major U. S. orchestra, flutist Doriot Anthony Dwyer, who remained as BSO principal for 38 years.

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 5

ERICH LEINSDORF / BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA



Mahler kept revising the orchestration of this work until his death. He conducted the first performance with the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne on October 18, 1904. It is scored for quadruple winds, six horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, tympani, three other drums, metal and wood percussion, harp, and string choir.

He'd begun the Fifth Symphony at Maiernegg in 1901 -- writing the third, first and second movements in that order, after a death-obsessed song, "Der Tamboursg'sell," and the Kindertotenlieder cycle ("on the death of children"). After nearly bleeding to death the previous winter (from an intestinal hemorrhage), Mahler's symphonic orientation underwent a profound change. During his recovery he immersed himself in the complete works of Bach.

A new appreciation of counterpoint was born, but not yet a mastery of orchestral balances or effects -- as subsequent events were to prove. Beginning with No. 5, he applied this new passion (which he called "intensive counterpoint") to five purely instrumental symphonies without Wunderhorn associations. Like the Resurrection Second and the first version of No. 1 (with the Blumine slow movement later abandoned) Mahler cast his Fifth Symphony in five movements that fall naturally into three parts.

The first begins in C sharp minor with a funeral march, of measured tread

and austere (Movement I). A sonata-form movement follows, marked "Stormily, with greatest vehemence" (Movement II), which shares themes as well as mood with the opening.

The second part (which Mahler composed first) is a scherzo: "Vigorously, not too fast" (Movement III) -- the symphony's shortest large section, but its longest single movement. This emphatically joyous, albeit manic movement puts forward D major as the work's focal key. Although its form has remained a topic of debate since 1904, rondo and sonata-form elements are both present.

Part Three begins with a seraphic Adagietto: "Very slowly" (Movement IV). This is indubitably related to the Rückert song Mahler composed in August 1901, "Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen" (I have become lost to the world...I live alone in my heaven, in my loving, in my song). A Rondo-Finale: "Allegro giocoso, lively" (Movement V) concludes the symphony, although Mahler devised a form far removed from classic models. While sectional, in truth episodic, this too has elements of sonata form. To weld its diverse components into a unity he wrote four "fugal episodes," with a D major chorale just before the final Allegro molto.

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- 1 Trauermarsch: In Gemessenem Schritt. Streng.
Wie Ein Kondukt 11:34**
- 2 Stürmisch Bewegt, Mit Grösster Vehemenz 13:01**
- 3 Scherzo: Kräftig, Nicht Zu Schnell 17:24**
- 4 Adagietto: Sehr Langsam 8:30**
- 5 Rondo-Finale: Allegro 14:05**
- Total Time: 64:41**

Horn – James Stagliano Trumpet – Roger Voisin
Recorded 1963 at Boston Symphony Hall by RCA Records
Engineer - Lewis Layton Producer - Richard Mohr



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