

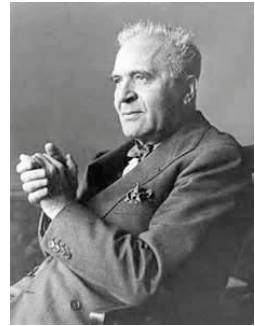
Gustav Mahler

Symphony

No. 1

Bruno Walter

Columbia Symphony Orchestra



Bruno Walter (born Bruno Schlessinger, September 15, 1876 – February 17, 1962) was a German-born conductor, pianist, and composer. Born in Berlin, he left Germany in 1933 to escape the Third Reich, settling finally in the United States in 1939. He worked closely with Gustav Mahler, whose music he helped establish in the repertory, held major positions with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Salzburg Festival, Vienna State Opera, Bavarian State Opera, Staatsoper Unter den Linden and Deutsche Oper Berlin, among others, made recordings of historical and artistic significance, and is widely considered one of the great conductors of the 20th century.

Born near Alexanderplatz in Berlin to a middle-class Jewish family, he began his musical education at the Stern Conservatory at the age of eight, making his first public appearance as a pianist when he was nine; he performed a concerto movement with the Berlin Philharmonic in 1889 and a full concerto with them in February, 1890. He studied composition at Stern with Robert Radeke de:Robert Radecke, and remained active as a composer until about 1910 (see list of compositions below). But it was seeing an 1889 concert by the Berlin Philharmonic led by Hans von Bülow, he wrote, that "decided my future. Now I knew what I was meant for. No musical activity but that of an orchestral conductor could any longer be considered by me. He made his conducting début at the Cologne Opera with Albert Lortzing's Der Waffenschmied in 1894. Later that year he left for the Hamburg Opera to work as a chorus director. There he first met and worked with Gustav Mahler, whom he revered and with whose music he later became strongly identified

Conducting In 1896, he was appointed Kapellmeister of the Stadttheater (municipal opera) in Breslau, on the strength of a recommendation from Mahler to the theater's director, Theodor Löwe. However, Löwe required that before taking up this position the young conductor change his last name from Schlessinger, which literally means Silesian, "because of its frequent occurrence in the capital of Silesia". In a letter to his brother paraphrased by Erik Ryding and Rebecca Pechefsky, Walter said he had "suggested several names, which Mahler wrote down and gave to Löwe, who returned the contract with the name Bruno Walter. These biographers add that Walter wrote to his parents that he found that "having to change his name was 'terrible,'" they report that Mahler and his sisters "pressed" Walter to make the change of name, and add that, contrary to occasional unsubstantiated reports, it "is unknown" whether Löwe's stipulation had anything to do with a desire to conceal Walter's Jewish origins. In 1897, Walter became Chief Conductor at the municipal opera in Pressburg. He found the town provincial and depressing, and in 1898 took the position of Chief Conductor of the Riga Opera, Latvia. While there, he converted to Christianity, probably Roman Catholicism. In 1899 Walter was appointed music director of the Temeswar, Austria-Hungary (now Timisoara, Romania) Opera. Walter then returned in 1900 to Berlin, where he assumed the post of Royal Prussian Conductor at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden, succeeding Franz Schalk; his colleagues there included Richard Strauss and Karl Muck. While in Berlin he also conducted the premiere of Der arme Heinrich by Hans Pfitzner, who became a lifelong friend.

In 1901, Walter accepted Mahler's invitation to be his assistant at the Court Opera in Vienna. Walter led Verdi's Aida at his debut. In 1907 he was elected by the Vienna Philharmonic to conduct its Nicolai Concert. In 1910, he helped Mahler select and coach solo singers for the premiere of Mahler's Symphony No. 8. In the following years Walter's conducting reputation soared as he was invited to conduct across Europe – in Prague, in London where in 1910 he conducted Tristan und Isolde and Ethel Smyth's The Wreckers at Covent Garden, and in Rome. When Mahler died on May 18, 1911, Walter was at his deathbed. On June 6, he wrote to his sister that he was to conduct the premiere of Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde, he did so in Munich on November 20, 1911, in the first half of an all-Mahler concert (the second half contained Mahler's Symphony No. 2 (Mahler) On June 26, 1912 he led the Vienna Philharmonic in the world premiere of Mahler's Symphony No. 9.

Allow me to be clear from the beginning that I am not against Bruno Walter's interpretation of Mahler; and, in-fact, on the contrary, I happen to enjoy most of them greatly. Post heart-attack Walter is a very different Bruno Walter in terms of interpretation. When you listen to old recordings by Walter you notice that he was much faster than in his stereo recordings with in the Columbia Symphony Orchestra. He also tends to be less metronomic, with very noticeable accelerandi in the climaxes, and his recordings often demonstrate a tremendous amount of punch from the brass and timpani (which is noticeable even in his recordings with the Columbia ensemble). Needless to say, I prefer the younger Walter, but I still think that he has much to say in his old age, despite the struggles that he had with health. I'm very partial to the Mahler performances of Klemperer and Walter, two conductors who were students and proteges of Mahler from the days when he conducted the Court Opera in Vienna. Both Klemperer and Walter were intimately familiar with Mahler's conducting of his own works -- and, judging by some noteworthy similarities in style, tone and tempo in the conducting of the two proteges even many decades later, that familiarity appears to have powerfully impressed Mahler's conducting on their memories.

As to the matter of Walter's age at the time of the later recordings here, and the Philharmonic versus the Columbia Symphony, this is really a non-issue. Yes, Walter had retired in 1956, and suffered serious heart problems that slowed him down. But the offer of the chance to make these recordings, which embodied a series of sessions from 1958 until 1962 (the year of his death), gave him a new lease on his professional life, as well as a final mission, to address the arrival of the then-new medium of stereo sound and leave a legacy that would continue to be heard beyond his own time. He rose to the occasion, as did the players

involved. And that brings us to the "Columbia Symphony Orchestra" as represented here -- it was comprised of many of the finest musicians on the West Coast, a good number of whom gave up higher-paying engagements at the time simply for the opportunity to make these recordings with Walter. And most of them, already at or near the top of their respective professions, outdid themselves -- don't forget that at this time, recording sessions devoted to Mahler's symphonies were rare and special occasions, and that classical recording was only just entering its boom time, when the advent of stereo precipitated the re-recording of virtually every piece of music under the sun that still mattered to audiences in the late 1950s early 1960s. Every session was special to some degree, and the quality and musicianship and the outlook of the generation of musicians then participating made recording on repertory like this even more important, as an opportunity that they all knew had eluded their predecessors. Who would ever have thought such opportunities, to record the Mahler 1st or the 9th, yet, would arise on the West Coast, and under this conductor, the man who introduced the 9th to the world? It was a gift from God for many of those concerned. The tendency wasn't just to rise to the occasion, but to soar wherever possible.

Walter's recordings were definitive at a time, unlike today, when there weren't hundreds of options to choose from. Nevertheless, Walter was to Mahler as Horowitz was to Rachmaninoff, Ansermet was to Stravinsky and so forth - these were close working relationships where the composer's musical vision was passed directly on to interpreters who had the insight and skills to communicate the music in their own unique way.

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- I. Langsam. Schleppend. Wie ein Naturlaut. Im anfang sehr gemächlich 13:23
- II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell 6:53
- III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen 11:28
- IV. Stürmisch bewegt - Energisch 20:24

Please Note: In the interest of preserving the superb sound quality of these historic recordings, they have been preserved in their original, pristine state for maximum fidelity. Transferred from commercially released, analog reel-to-reel tapes (some of which are more than 50 years old), the recordings themselves can be subject to certain "artifacts" which are an inseparable part of the original analog recording process, such as tape "hiss" or other defects, and these may be audible on certain music tracks. Because your CD or DVD-A was individually "burned" in order to realize superior sound quality to stamped, mass-produced versions, microscopic cosmetic blemishes may be visible. Please regard these tiny marks as evidence of the "human touch" in the care and individual attention that each and every HDTT disc receives during its very demanding manufacturing process.



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