

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.



Facts about this Recording

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Mahler

Symphony No. 4

Fritz Reiner
Chicago Symphony Orchestra

soprano
Lisa della Casa.



HIGH DEFINITION TAPE TRANSFERS

Mahler Symphony No. 4

Fritz Reiner Chicago Symphony Orchestra with soprano Lisa della Casa.

1. *Bedächtigt, nicht eilen* (Moderately, not rushed) (Sonata Form)
2. *In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast* (Leisurely moving, without haste) (Scherzo & Trio)
3. *Ruhevoll, poco adagio* (Peacefully, somewhat slowly) (Theme & Variations)
4. *Sehr behaglich* (Very comfortably) (Strophic)

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Mahler's first four symphonies are often referred to as the "Wunderhorn" symphonies because many of their themes originate in earlier songs by Mahler on texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn). The fourth symphony is built around a single song, "Das himmlische Leben". It is prefigured in various ways in the first three movements and sung in its entirety by a solo soprano in the fourth movement.

Mahler composed "Das himmlische Leben" as a free-standing piece in 1892. The title is Mahler's own: in the Wunderhorn collection the poem is called "Der Himmel hängt voll Geigen" (an idiomatic expression akin to "there's not a cloud in the sky"). Several years later Mahler considered using the song in the fifth and seventh movement, the finale, of his Third symphony. While motifs from "Das himmlische Leben" are found in the Third symphony, Mahler eventually decided not to include it in that work and, instead, made the song the goal and source of his Fourth Symphony. The Fourth Symphony thus presents a thematic fulfilment of the musical world of the Third, which is part of the larger tetralogy of the first four symphonies, as Mahler described them to Natalie Bauer-Lechner. Early plans in which the Symphony was projected as a six-movement work included another Wunderhorn song, "Das irdische Leben" ("Earthly Life") as a somber pendant to "Das himmlische Leben," offering a tableau of childhood starvation in juxtaposition to heavenly abundance, but Mahler later decided on a simpler structure for the score.

Structure

A typical performance of the Fourth lasts about an hour, making it one of Mahler's shorter symphonies. The performing forces are also small by Mahler's usual standard. These features have made it the most frequently performed Mahler symphony, though in recent years the First has gained ground.

The movements of the symphony:

Bedächtig, nicht eilen (Moderately, not rushed) (Sonata Form)

In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast (Leisurely moving, without haste) (Scherzo & Trio)

Ruhevoll, poco adagio (Peacefully, somewhat slowly) (Theme & Variations)

Sehr behaglich (Very comfortably) (Strophic)

Flutes and sleigh bells open the unusually restrained first movement (and used later with a melodic theme known

commonly as the 'bell theme', which helps define sections throughout the movement) often described as possessing classical poise. As would be expected for the first movement of a symphony, the first movement of Mahler's Symphony No. 4 is in sonata form.

The second movement is a scherzo that features a part for a solo violin whose strings are tuned a tone higher than usual. The violin depicts *Freund Hein*, (lit. "Friend Henry") a figure from medieval German art; *Hain* (or *Hein*) is a traditional German personification of death, invented by poet *Matthias Claudius*. *Freund Hein* is a skeleton who plays the fiddle and leads a *Totentanz* or "danse macabre". According to Mahler's widow, *Alma*, Mahler took inspiration for this movement from an 1872 painting by the Swiss artist *Arnold Böcklin* entitled *Self-Portrait with Death playing the Fiddle*. The scherzo represents his dance and the unusual tuning of the violin adds tension to its sound and contributes to the music's ghostly character.

The third movement is a solemn processional march cast as a set of variations. Mahler uses the theme and variation structure in a more unconventional way. This movement can be divided into five main sections: A1 – B1 – A2 – B2 – A3 – CODA. The theme is presented in the first 16 bars of A1, but the true variations don't appear until section A3, although the theme is developed slightly within the preceding sections; sections A1, A2, B1 and B2 are in bar form. This movement remains mostly in G major, but does modulate to D minor, E minor and E major; the B2 section has a rather unstable tonality, being more chromatic and moving through many keys.

The fourth movement opens with a relaxed, bucolic scene in G major. A child, voiced by a soprano, presents a sunny, naive vision of Heaven and describes the feast being prepared for all the saints. The scene has its darker elements: the child makes it clear that the heavenly feast takes place at the expense of animals, including a sacrificed lamb. The child's narrative is punctuated by faster passages recapitulating the first movement. Unlike the final movement of traditional symphonies, the fourth movement of Mahler's No. 4 is essentially a song, containing verses, with interludes, a prelude and a postlude (a strophic structure). By the time the postlude is heard, there is a modulation to E major (the tonic major of the relative minor) and unusually stays in this key, ending the symphony away from the tonic of G major. Several ties to the Third Symphony can be heard in these passages as well.