

Bruno Walter (born Bruno Schlesinger, 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 debut 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 Schlesinger, 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*;[8] 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*.



# Mahler

## Symphony No. 9

### Bruno Walter

conducts the  
Columbia Symphony Orchestra



By 1909, when the anguished Mahler penned his Ninth Symphony, he had tragically lost his four-year-old daughter and learned of the heart ailment that would contribute to his own death two years later. The last symphony he completed, the Ninth, is a defiant affirmation of life as well as a poignant acceptance of mortality, which secured Mahler's immortality.

Mahler was not at all prepared for what the doctor told him, and that diagnosis came at a critical time in his professional life as well as a tragic one for his family. In that same year, 1907, Mahler concluded his brilliant but stormy tenure as director of the Vienna Opera and took up a new one with the Metropolitan Opera in New York. At that critical time his life had to be changed, all his physical activities curtailed; at the age of 47, he concentrated his creative energies on achieving as much as he could under what he himself referred to as a "death sentence." In her memoirs, many years later, Alma Mahler would describe 1907 as a year "so blackly underlined in the calendar of our life," and the summer of the following year as "the saddest we had ever spent or were to spend together. Every excursion, every attempt at distraction, was a failure. Grief and anxiety pursued us wherever we went. Work was his one resource. He slaved at *Das Lied von der Erde* and the first drafts of the Ninth."

In his biography of Mahler, Walter confirms that Mahler hesitated to call *Das Lied* his Ninth because "for Beethoven and Bruckner, a Ninth was written *finis*. (Mahler) hesitated to challenge fate." That seems a clear victory for those who believe that Mahler feared number 9, except that Walter went on to write, "It may be that a superstitious shrinking from a Ninth prevented (Mahler) from talking about it. Yet, in that clear and powerful mind, I have never detected any trace of superstition. Nor could there have been anything of the sort here." A statement and a contradiction from the same writer! Richard Specht, a well-known Austrian music critic and essayist who wrote many biographies, including one about his friend Mahler, leads us to believe that Mahler may have been superstitious about number 9 after all. Specht gives us to understand

that after completing *Das Lied*, Mahler felt that he had warded off the fateful danger. But, did he get that information from Mahler himself, or from the unreliable Alma?

Deryk Cooke pointed out that the shape of Mahler's Ninth is similar to that of Tchaikovsky's Sixth (*Pathétique*). Both works have large first movements, with slow and fast passages: both begin and end quietly; both have dance-like movements, the Mahler alternating waltzes with *ländler*, the Tchaikovsky in 5/4 meter, which has been described as a 3/4 waltz with a limp; both third movements feature virtuoso marches; both have powerful *adagio* finales, which do not end so much as die out. It is implied that Mahler copied the form of *Pathétique*, which was just 16 years old when Mahler began his Ninth Symphony. However, this becomes questionable when it is realized that Mahler had contempt for the *Pathétique* Symphony! Sometime, circa 1901, Mahler was discussing the *Pathétique* with Guido Adler, a well-known musicologist and friend of his. As Natalie Bauer-Lechner notes (*Recollections of Gustav Mahler* by NBL), Mahler told Adler that he considered *Pathétique*, "...a shallow, superficial, distressingly homophobic work, no better than salon music. Tchaikovsky's coloring is fake, sand thrown in someone's eyes! If you look closely, there is precious little there. Those rising and falling arpeggios, those meaningless sequences of chords, can't disguise the fundamental lack of invention and the emptiness."

In 1938 Henry Boys wrote that the predominant mood of both *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Ninth Symphony "is one of consuming nostalgia and world-weariness," and that the drama of the Ninth "might be thought of as expressing the conflict of final reconciliation of Mahler's personal world with some more peaceful world towards which he had always aspired." Mahler himself, who once declared that "all music since Beethoven has been program music," said of his own Ninth (and specifically of its final *Adagio*), "There is no more irony, no sarcasm, no resentment whatever; there is only the majesty of death."

# Gustav Mahler Symphony No. 9

Bruno Walter conducts the  
Columbia Symphony Orchestra

1-Andante comodo 29:11

2-Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers.

Etwas täppisch und sehr derb 17:33

3-Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig 13:03

4-Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend 21:09

Total time: 80:56

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