

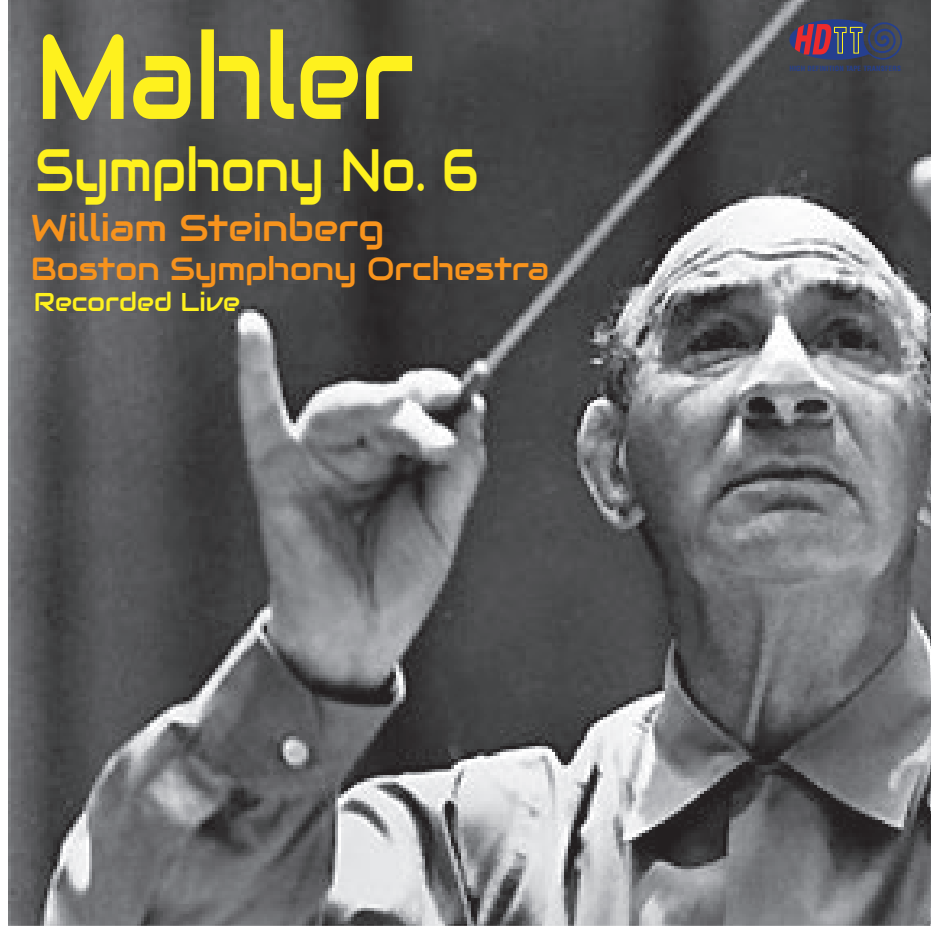
Finale. Sostenuto. (Sustained). This huge sonata-form movement is one of Mahler's most epic in scope and conception. It nearly dwarfs the rest of the symphony and certainly represents its cornerstone, both structurally and emotionally. It opens with an impressionistic sweep that extends out to the somber introduction. After this, the main material is a powerful march that three times rises to exultation, only to be overcome by the motto theme and each of the three hammer strokes. The movement concludes with a long and mournful coda, unremitting to the end.

In 1960 William Steinberg scored a great success guest conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra and was the preferred choice of its board for their next music director, as Charles Münch was stepping down from the position. However, RCA, the orchestra's record company, successfully pressured them to appoint Erich Leinsdorf, already on their roster of conductors. After Leinsdorf's tenure, one of mixed success, ended, they did appoint Steinberg to the post effective 1969. This was also only a partial success, because then health problems interfered with his abilities and caused frequent substitutions. He left the position in 1972 and restricted his activities.

Mahler

Symphony No. 6

William Steinberg
Boston Symphony Orchestra
Recorded Live



As with his Fifth Symphony, this work is exclusively instrumental. It is also Mahler's most "Classical" symphony in its form and layout. Although the Sixth Symphony has no specific program, much has been written about the "tragic" aspects of the work that gave rise to its subtitle, which, by the way, was withdrawn by Mahler before publication. The prevailing dark mood is not unusual for Mahler, but there is no transformation into a glorious ending or peaceful resignation. It is his only symphony to end unremittingly in the minor. As for the autobiographical elements, it is known from Alma Mahler's memoirs that it may have been Mahler himself upon whom three hammer strokes of fate fall in the Finale, which seems strangely prophetic of the following year when Mahler lost his Vienna Opera position, lost his daughter, and was diagnosed with heart disease. The song quotes, Ländlers, country tunes, bird calls, and military marches are all gone. In their place is a powerful and stark contrapuntal texture, certainly not devoid of soaring melodies and lush harmonies, but lacking in the referential styles of the early symphonies. The entire symphony is unified by a motto theme that consists of a major moving to minor triad over a characteristic rhythm. It carries particular significance in the Finale, as it is linked with the aforementioned hammer strokes of fate. Many commentators believe this to be Mahler's most cohesive and tautly organized symphony.

Allegro energico, ma non troppo. Heftig, aber markig. (Not too fast. Vigorous, but marked). This is a standard sonata form with repeated exposition. The opening theme is harsh and march-like, while the sweeping second subject, written specifically as a portrayal of Mahler's wife, Alma, is in sharp contrast. The themes are developed imaginatively, and the movement closes triumphantly with the "Alma theme."

Scherzo. Wuchtig. (Forcefully). This movement is usually performed second, but Mahler seems to have always placed it after the *Andante*. This is the first of Mahler's really diabolical scherzos. It is a bizarre, grotesquely stamping dance full of percussive strokes and shrieking woodwinds. This alternates with a strange little trio to which Mahler gives the marking *Altväterisch* (Old-fashioned). It is full of rhythmic ingenuity in its timid and hesitant manner.

Andante moderato. (Moderately moving). Alma reported in her memoirs that this pastoral and nostalgic movement was a musical depiction of their children at play. It is simple in form, and rather yearning and plaintive in mood.

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- 1 Allegro energico, ma non troppo 16:45
- 2 Scherzo. Wuchtig 12:46
- 3 Andante moderato 11:25
- 4 Finale: Allegro moderato 25:46

Performed October 16, 1971, at Boston Symphony Hall
This recording was made possible from the music archives of Clark Johnsen



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