



Leopold Ludwig was a leading Austrian conductor. Particularly well known as an opera conductor, he was also one of the first to make stereo LP recordings of symphonies of Gustav Mahler. He learned piano as a boy and continued to study the instrument at the Vienna Conservatory with Emil Pauer. He began his conducting career in the traditional German manner, working himself up through a number of coaching and then conducting positions in provincial opera houses in south Germany and in Brno, Czechoslovakia. He became the Music Director of the Oldenburg Staatsoper (State Opera) in 1936. Frequent guest conducting appearances in Berlin brought him to national attention, leading to his appointment as Principal Conductor of the Vienna Staatsoper in 1939. He became Principal Conductor of the Berlin Städtische Oper in 1943. After the war he continued in that position until 1951, and also frequently conducted at the Berlin Staatsoper. ("Städtische" means "Municipal"; the prefix "Staats-" means "State." The Berlin Städtische Oper is now the Deutsche Opera Berlin.) In 1950, Ludwig was appointed General Music Director of the Hamburg Staatsoper, effective 1951. This was the base for his expanding international reputation, and he remained there until 1971. He was an active and effective administrator, and improved its artistic and musical standards. In 1952, he took it on an important festival visit, to the Edinburgh Festival in the United Kingdom, beginning a practice of taking to major foreign venues and festivals. (Another of the company's most important overseas visits was to the Lincoln Center Festival in New York in 1967). He also modernized and broadened the company's repertory. He also made notable guest conducting appearances. He debuted in the United States at the San Francisco Opera in 1958, frequently returning there through 1968. He led the Glyndebourne (England) Festival Opera's first production of Richard Strauss' Der Rosenkavalier in 1959. He championed Paul Hindemith's opera Mathis der Maler in a series of performances in 1967, though a series of cuts he made in it were considered questionable. His first appearance with the Metropolitan Opera House in New York was in 1970, leading Wagner's Parsifal. He conducted in concerts with many leading orchestras. With the London Symphony Orchestra he made a pioneering recording of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, and conducted such leading orchestras as the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. He was known for his calm platform demeanor and lack of flashiness. He was always praised for his competence and way with balancing orchestral sounds to make outstanding effects, though some detractors sometimes rated him as highly competent and sometimes less than inspired.

## Facts about this Recording

Transferred from a 15ips 2-track tape

Producer and Engineer: Bert Whyte Recorded by Everest  
in 1959 on 35mm Film at Walthamstow Assembly Hall

## MAHLER Symphony no 9 in D major

Leopold Ludwig London Symphony Orchestra



Composed in 1909-10, Mahler's last completed symphony was a product of his time as chief conductor of, first, the Metropolitan Opera, then the New York Philharmonic; most of the composition, though, was done back home in Austria. Its four-movement form echoes that of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony, which Mahler knew and conducted: a first movement mingling slow and faster music, two faster movements, then a long, slow finale.

Mahler, who lived from 1860 to 1911, bridged the transition from late romanticism to the age of the German expressionist painters, with their jagged caricatures and raw colors. About an hour and 25 minutes long, by turns earthy and sublime, The deeply felt Ninth Symphony offers a typical hybrid of melancholy and spiteful defiance.

Leonard Bernstein speculated that the hushed, faltering opening evoked the composer's recently diagnosed heart murmur, a forecast of the "Abschied" motif in *The Song of the Earth*. Then the second violins introduce a sighing-then-soaring theme that, variously fragmented and developed, permeates the whole of the nearly 30-minute movement.

The second movement — marked "leisurely, clumsy, heavy-footed, coarse" — combines two related dances, a peasant *ländler* and a rather rowdy waltz. The third, a *Burleske* to be played "very defiantly," thunders a tempest of complex textures, touched by sad tenderness.

Although Mahler immediately went to work on his never-to-be-completed Tenth Symphony, we can hear the Ninth's finale, solemn, introspective, and sometimes retrospective, as a farewell. As in the first movement, the music virtually disintegrates at the end—"a kind of polyphony to the last," the late Michael Steinberg wrote, "the cellos and second violins gently firm, the first violins and violas softly afloat. Grief gives way to peace, music and silence become one

Everest presented the first stereo recording of the 9th, this 1959 version by Leopold Ludwig (1908-1979). Ludwig's repute on record rests almost entirely in the Beethoven concertos he inscribed for EMI with Emil Gilels. Here, we can evaluate Ludwig on his own merits. Ludwig's Mahler Ninth avoids histrionics and melodrama to offer instead a clear-headed and lyrical account of a great symphony. The LSO play with precision and power under a conductor who recognizes that the beauty and profundity of Mahler's music can be conveyed perfectly without exaggerated gestures. The original 35mm magnetic film makes this 1959 recording sound as if it were yesterday's vintage. The inner movements benefit from Ludwig's breezy extroversion, even though the conductor ignores Mahler's *piu mosso* directive for the *Ländler* movement's second subject. Ludwig conveys the grandeur of the massive outer movements in a straightforward manner that downplays the music's tortured qualities. The London Symphony Orchestra plays well, notwithstanding high strings whose ensemble and intonation are sometimes frayed around the edges. Ludwig's refreshingly un-neurotic Mahler 9th is a fascinating and often convincing foil to Leonard Bernstein's ailing-heart-on-sleeve point of view. The

excellence of their playing is confirmed by the recorded sound. Frankly, it's amazing and no allowances whatsoever have to be made for the fact that the recording is, at the time of writing a few weeks short of 55 years old. A copious amount of detail emerges, though without any undue spotlighting of instruments. Additionally, there's a wide but not exaggerated stereo spread, and there's also a fine dynamic range which means that the soft playing is well reported but also that the climaxes register with impressive power. The only slight reservation I have is that the treble frequencies — high violin lines and the flutes and piccolo — can sound a little bit shrill in some loud passages. As Everest used 35mm film to record the performance there's no hiss. This recording was an impressive achievement by producer Bert Whyte and engineer Aaron Nathanson, Ludwig's way with the score may not be to all tastes. Compared to some conductors, his approach to the first movement is direct and, at times, almost no-nonsense. Thus, for example, as early as 0:21 there's no easing into the string melody which, in truth, starts in a slightly prosaic fashion. It's worth persevering, though, for Ludwig's straightforward style brings its own rewards: his conducting is cogent and he doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve. The performance contains ample passion and fire, while Ludwig controls the whole. Ludwig's taut, objective way with the score has much to commend it. He has a tight grip on the musical argument and an evident command of detail throughout. Ludwig's objective approach allows us a valid alternative to the more neurotic readings by Bernstein and Tennstedt. Ludwig adopts a brisk tempo for the *Ländler* theme at the start of the second movement; and every time this material is revisited, he's consistent in his pacing. Mahler uses the word *gemächlichen* — 'leisurely' — in his tempo indication, and Ludwig is certainly not leisurely. Ludwig's core tempo may be too swift, and as a result when Mahler moves to a new, quicker tempo, there's insufficient contrast. However, other passages in the movement are more shrewdly judged and some listeners may be relieved that Ludwig doesn't fall into the trap of making the *Ländler* sound too portly. The *Rondo-Burleske* is fast and furious. Ludwig takes no prisoners here, and the music has a vivid, frenetic feel, as required. The recording allows us to hear all the teeming detail of Mahler's scoring. The last reprise of the *Rondo* electrifies: the LSO articulates the music terrifically despite Ludwig's very challenging tempo. The great concluding *Adagio* is noble and eloquent though, once again, Ludwig refuses to wear his heart on his sleeve and thus, commendably, avoids making the music sound overwrought. Ludwig maintains a sense of flow. The LSO rises magnificently to the occasion, its strings eloquent. The horns are magnificent too, especially in their contribution to the extended climax passage. Arguably, those fragile closing pages could and should have been drawn out a bit more; but aided by some very sensitive string playing, Ludwig brings to symphony to a quietly satisfying close. This may not be a reading that displaces the very best in the pantheon of Mahler Ninths on disc, but this unfairly unsung recording remains a significant achievement, nonetheless, well worth the attention of Mahler collectors.

# MAHLER

## Symphony no 9 in D major

### Leopold Ludwig London Symphony Orchestra

- I. Andante comodo**
- II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb**
- III. Rondo-Burleske: Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig**
- IV. Adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend**

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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 HD TT disc receives during its very demanding manufacturing process.



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