

**Theses of DLA doctoral dissertation**

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**Gustav Mahler's Vocal Pieces**

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## 1. Antecedents of research

The choice of the subject of my **DLA** dissertation originates primarily in my practice as a performer. Both as a singer and teacher I regard the detailed analysis of the pieces, the history of the origin of the songs, the exact keeping of the composer's notes related to interpretation and loyalty to the score as important. Therefore, the knowledge of the literature regarding the subject is essential in addition to the studying of the musical score.

The literature in connection with Gustav Mahler's life and life-work is almost inexhaustible so it is extremely difficult to add to the already existing rich sources. The majority of the publications of the Mahler research are in foreign languages. Besides earlier publications only a few books were published in Hungarian, such as Jonathan Carr's book entitled *Az igazi Mahler*, which was published in 2005. It would be worth supplying this need. The literature in foreign languages, mainly in German, that I know bases its subject on biographical data in many cases and an unnecessary parallel is drawn frequently between the origin and atmosphere of the pieces as well as the composer's life situation. Analytical studies that are objective in tone are relatively rare. The publications based on Mahler's letters are of an outstanding significance as they really contain the composer's authentic thoughts without any interpretation or change. For example, Herta Blaukopf's book entitled *Gustav Mahler Briefe*, published in Vienna.

In the field of musical score publications the *Kritische Gesamtausgabe* published from 1993, which reconstructs, through the pioneering work Renate Hilmar-Voit and Thomas Hampson, the *Wunderhorn-songs* with the original piano accompaniment created by Mahler, was an especially great breakthrough.

## 2. The sources

In my dissertation I mainly rely on the musical score and I especially use the small musical scores of the *Philharmonia Partitura* series. I examine the version of the songs with piano accompaniment on the basis of the scores of the *Schott Publishing House*.

I have read a part of the literature as "lectures" such as the biographical publications, however, I do not, or only rarely rely on these sources. I regarded the recollections of Mahler's family and friends, e.g. Herbert Killian's book entitled *Gustav Mahler in den Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner* or Alma Mahler's *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler*

as authentic sources. In the author's correspondence collected by Herta Blaukopf I found suitable quotations related to the origin of the individual songs regarding the musical composer's own ideas.

My analytical work was helped by Hermann Danuser's *Gustav Mahler und seine Zeit* published in 1991, Elisabeth Schmierer's *Die Orchesterlieder von G. Mahler* published in 1991, and, from among the earlier publications Theodor W. Adorno's book on Mahler published in 1960 and Kurt Blaukopf's *Gustav Mahler, oder Zeitgenosse der Zukunft* published in Vienna in 1969. From among the books based on the most recent researches I frequently refer to Jens Malte Fischer's work entitled *Gustav Mahler, der fremde Vertraute* published in 2003.

Stefan Bodo Würffel's writing entitled *Mahlers Textwahl und Textbehandlung*, which was published on the occasion of the Mahler festival in Hamburg in 1989, tackles the issue of Mahler's choice of text and text handling.

As I approach the pieces primarily as a singer-performer I believe it is important to use Mahler's close collaborator's, conductor Bruno Walter's book on Mahler also published in Budapest and the Foreword to Pierre Boulez's *Philharmonia Partitura* publications.

### **3. The method**

I have chosen Gustav Mahler's vocal works as the subject of my dissertation. Within the vocal pieces I mainly focus on the songs, I follow their development from the version with piano accompaniment to the orchestral versions and I occasionally examine the development of the individual song into a symphony movement. Thus an outlook to the *Wunderhorn* symphonies is unavoidable. I analyze the change in tone and instrumentation, and call attention to the vocal and instrumental song-quotations within the symphonies. During the elaboration of the subject I discuss the composer's life-work comprehensively, as a unity, paying attention to each song because the simplest popular mocking or children's song is part of the development process just as the later orchestral song cycles. The *Das klagende Lied* is not a song but a peculiar mixture of the cantata and the oratorio but still it is worth analyzing it as the starting point of Mahler's later orchestral song cycles and as an early manifestation of his treasury of music. The song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* means the summary and closing of the composer's vocal oeuvre.

During my analyses I pay special attention to explaining Mahler's notes related to interpretation and to the method of handling the text. Since the literature in connection with

Mahler's art is almost inexhaustible. I try to go my own way and contribute to a more authentic interpretation of Mahler's work with pieces of information and observation useful from the viewpoint of the performing art and loyalty to the score.

#### 4. The results

The choice of the subject of my dissertation came from my personal practice as a performer. I know the songs "from inside", interspersed with sense and sentiment. However, the dissertation was written on the bases of serious theoretical literature and in an objective approach. As compared to the literature known to me it serves with more information from the viewpoint of practical performance. Mahler's instructions related to interpretation greatly differ from other composer's terminology and indicate in detail the composer's intentions. Their interpretation is essential from the viewpoint of an authentic performance.

Mahler frequently changed the poems he used so the composer has to be evaluated as a fellow poet as well, and it has to be analyzed how and why he did so, when the handling of the text serves the music and when harmony and colours are subordinated to the contents of the text. The contradictions have to be emphasized, too. This knowledge can primarily help the quality of the performances. My dissertation can serve as a study mainly for artists and artist-candidates.

#### 5. The activity connected to the subject of the dissertation

- 1990. Erkel-Kodály International Singing Competition, 2<sup>nd</sup> place. In the Final I sang **Mahler's** song cycle entitled *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. Contributor: the Symphony Orchestra of the Hungarian Radio, conductor: András Ligeti.
- 1990. Concerts at the Banqueting Hall of the Academy of Music: *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, contributor: Pécs Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Lajos Blázy. *Kindertotenlieder*, Szeged Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor: Balázs Kocsár.
- During several musical evenings a few song of the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* series were a part of my programme.
- 2009. Marble Hall of the Hungarian Radio: *Kindertotenlieder, Fünf Lieder nach den Gedichten von Friedrich Rückert*, Piano: Daniel Dinyés
- March 2009. Palace of Arts, Budapest: *Das Lied von der Erde*, Symphony Orchestra of the Hungarian Radio, conductor: Mátyás Antal.