

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911), *Lieder eines Fahrenden Gesellen (Songs of a Wayfarer)*

It is ironic to write program notes for one of Mahler's compositions, because he violently disapproved of program notes. He felt they propagated false ideas and stood between his music and an audience's natural understanding. Mahler did not want listeners to be prejudiced by someone else's interpretation. He felt he had succeeded as a composer, if the ideas he was trying to convey in the music were received and understood without verbal explanation. Mahler often felt misrepresented by critics, anyway, and once stated that, if language could tell the whole story, there was no need to write music.

Mahler was more famous in his lifetime as a conductor than as a composer. He lived in Vienna and revolutionized the production and lighting of operas he conducted. He tended to compose during the summer and conduct during the winter months. At first his compositions were not well received, because they were so monumental, emotional, and personal. But over time, this came to be more acceptable, and he always had fanatical devotees who championed his cause. Mahler was meticulous in his attention to detail about all aspects of music. His scores are full of written-out instructions for both the conductors and the players. And every expressive change of tempo or dynamic level is written into the music, so there is no chance of misunderstanding his intentions.

The *Songs of a Wayfarer* is a song cycle of four songs for mezzo soprano or baritone, accompanied by either piano or orchestra. They were written in 1884, using his own poetry from an unhappy love affair he experienced during his time in Kassel (1883-1885). He was always very fond of these songs and used them as part of the thematic material for his first symphony. He revised the songs later in 1896, after he became more experienced as a composer. Mahler's works always show a strong connection with nature and with the questions of life, death, and love. He also had a deep admiration for Austrian folk culture and was extremely patriotic and spiritually sensitive. These songs, written early in his career, show hints of all these elements and provide a taste of the grandeur and magnificence of the work he was yet to write.

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