MAHLER

Symphony No. 5 in c-sharp minor

Symphonica of London

Wyn MORRIS

mc OPUS

Gustav Mahler
Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor

1	I. Trauermarsch.	14:28
2	II. Stürmisch bewegt. Mit größter Vehemenz	17:23
3	III. Scherzo, Kräftig, nicht zu schnell	20:10
4	IV. Adagietto. Sehr langsam	8:13
5	V. Rondo - Finale. Allegro	17:01

Symphonica of London
Wyn Morris, *conductor*

Recorded in 1974.
Producer: **Isabella Wallich**
Engineer: **Michael Gray**
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NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

In February 1901, a few years into his tenure as director of the Court Opera in Vienna (now the Staatsoper Wien) and three months after the premiere of his *Fourth Symphony*, **Gustav Mahler** suffered a severe hemorrhage that nearly ended his life. The incident prompted profound reflections on mortality that would be reflected in the emotional arc of his next work.

Mahler had fully recovered by the summer, during which time he spent his time at his summer property – a newly built villa and a nearby "composing hut" on property he had purchased on the southern banks of the Wörthersee in Carinthia. Mahler's *Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor*, composed primarily during the summers of 1901 (during which he completed sketches of the first three movements) and 1902, marks a pivotal shift in his style toward purely instrumental music without the use of voices (in his Second through *Fourth Symphonies*) or programs (in all four previous symphonies), ushering in what could be called his "middle period" that coincided with a shift in literary focus from the folklore of *Des knaben Wunderhorn* to the poetry of Friedrich Rückert.

Mahler completed the orchestration by October 1903, with revisions following a 1904 read-through by the Vienna Philharmonic. He conducted the premiere on October 18, 1904, with the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne; this performance received mixed reviews, and Mahler made the first in a series of revisions – a process that continued until near the time of his death.

The symphony divides into three parts across five movements:

Part I is in two movements. The opening fanfare is similar to a muted trumpet figure that emerges during the development section of the *Fourth Symphony*'s first movement – Mahler himself referred to it as "der kleine Appel" (the small summons). It is indeed a fanfare for a "Trauermarsch" (funeral march). Many moods emerge within the movement, from images of a stately funeral procession to a more sense of intimate mourning to a shocking, chromatically intense outburst of rage.

Mahler would later tell his publisher that the funeral march was in fact an extended introduction to the true first movement. It has been speculated that this movement, in an extended and sometimes slightly subverted sonata allegro form (including the reappearance of a theme from the funeral march), was Mahler's explicit reaction to and catharsis for his near-death experience – particularly the episode toward the end of the movement, when a triumphal chorale figure outburst reminiscent of the ending of his *Fourth Symphony*'s third movement suddenly unravels into a delicately scored, ominous conclusion that seemingly fades into fragmented silence.

Part II is the central Scherzo, in which the principal horn is featured in a near-concertante role. The music is for the most part light, merry, and in a three-beat-to-the-bar rhythm that suggests rustic waltzes and music for folk dancing. As with the previous movement, there are moments of suddenly shifted mood – doleful phrases from the solo horn, and an urgent, intense accelerando and crescendo toward the end of the movement that concludes with a manic burst of staccato chords, bringing the dance to a seemingly abrupt but distinctive conclusion.

Part III begins with the most popular single movement of any Mahler symphony: the famous Adagietto. This movement has long been theorized to be Gustav's love letter to his wife Alma, a view reinforced by one of Mahler's closest colleagues, conductor Willem Mengelberg, who reported that Mahler had specific words from Mahler to Alma

that underpinned its principal melody. Scored for strings and harp, the music is harmonically less complex that that of the other movements, closer in style to Mahler's Rückert songs, particularly, as several authors have noted, *Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen*.

The Finale follows immediately with an introductory exchange between the horn, bassoon, and oboe that evokes a woodland bird conversation — and suddenly we have passed through a world of death, struggle, and love to unambiguously joyous, life-affirming energy. Themes from prior movements intertwine in intricate counterpoint in a sequence of musical episodes, culminating in an heroic celebration, rather than otherworldly redemption, based on the chorale that appeared toward the end of the second movement.

NOTES ON THE ARTIST

Although never achieved the status of celebrity maestro, **Wyn Morris** was one of the most individualistic and brilliant conductors that Britain has produced, an interpreter whose readings of Beethoven, Mahler, and late-Romantic repertoire drew excited reviews from audience and critics alike.

Producer John Boyden said of Morris, "In certain repertoire, there's no question that he was head and shoulders above most modern conductors – and I really mean most, like 99 per cent of them. He had an understanding of breadth and depth, of long viewing. He wasn't dealing in bars... he was going for the sweep!"

Morris's father, composer Haydn Morris, turned down appointments at the Royal Academy of Music and in Canada and spent his life as a church organist and choirmaster in Wales. Wyn followed in his footsteps, studying at the Royal Academy and then at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, where he worked closely with conductor Igor Markevitch. Impressed by the talents of the 28-year-old conductor, George Szell extended an invitation to Morris to come to Cleveland to aid him in Cleveland Orchestra rehearsals and to direct the Orpheus Choir and the Cleveland Chamber Symphony.

But Morris would later claim that his actual schooling in music had come from listening to wartime broadcasts of Wilhelm Furtwängler emanating from German radio.

Morris founded the Welsh Symphony Orchestra and was its music director until 1957. When he returned to the United Kingdom in 1960, Morris became music director of the Royal National Eisteddfod in Wales, holding that post until 1962. The following year, his career moved forward when he made his London debut as a conductor with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. Hired by his alma mater, Morris was made a fellow by the Royal Academy of Music in 1964. A year later, he established with violinist Sidney Sax the Symphonica of London, a move that enabled him to present in concert (and record) many of Mahler's works, including the first stereo recording of *Das klagende Lied*, the debut recording of the 1893 edition of *Symphony No. 1*, and the first studio recording of Deryck Cooke's realization of the *Tenth Symphony*.

Morris's career was derailed on multiple occasions by confrontations with ensemble management and alcoholism, but his return to the studio in the late 1980s yielded an extraordinary "old school" Beethoven Symphony cycle with the London Symphony Orchestra – a critically acclaimed project that more than one critic saw as a persuasive rejoinder to the rising "period instrument" approach to classical and early romantic music – along with an amazingly idiomatic recording of Aaron Copland's *A Lincoln Portrait* narrated by Lady Margaret Thatcher.

In the late 1990s, Morris conducted a series of performances with the New Queen's Hall Orchestra, playing on early 20th century instruments, in acclaimed "original instrument" concerts that included works by Elgar, Wagner, and Mahler's *Fourth* and *Sixth Symphonies*.

Wyn Morris died in 2010.

Audra Fendrick

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