



KINDERMAHLER

# KinderMahler

A proposal for an international project focused on Gustav Mahler and the themes of children and childhood.

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Surprisingly, one of the least investigated areas in Mahler scholarship is the significance of children and childhood in the composer's work and aesthetic universe. The themes of children and childhood function in multifaceted, contradictory and often superimposed ways in Mahler's work, and their investigation not only unravels an *idée fixe* on the part of the composer, but could work as an interpretative key to his musical philosophy and language. From the fairy-tale world of *Das klagende Lied*, his recurring obsession with the *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* collection (both as text and as a source for musical rumination) to the uncomfortable irony of the Fourth Symphony and the dense shadows of *Kindertotenlieder*, Mahler used children and childhood as themes or actual musical material to construct one of the most resilient motifs in his work.

**The proposed project places children and childhood at the center of Mahler's music and aims to kindle many different approaches and experiences arising from the specific theme. Apart from this being an opportunity to re-experience Mahler's music both in performance and in academic settings, the main thrust of the project is the involvement of schools from around the world in a creative and highly interactive relationship with Mahler's music.**

In this way, **the theme (children) becomes the creator**, and in this way, the Mahler tradition keeps on going in radical, imaginative and playful pathways.

In truth, this project aims to bring creativity, performance and education in a vital and never-ceasing dialogue, and in this way create new bonds between audiences, educators, young people, artists and Mahler's music.

### **Event 1      Academic conference: Children and childhood in Mahler's life and work**

An international conference inviting top researchers and musicians specializing in Mahler's music and 19<sup>th</sup> century symphonic and vocal music to approach the Mahlerian oeuvre through the lens of childhood and children. The conference will be a collaboration between an academic institution and the Mahler Foundation, taking place in real time/space, but also available through live streaming through the Foundation's social media. Ideally, a selection of the presentations, discussions and round tables can be transcribed and adapted to become part of a monograph dedicated to the specific topic.

### **Event 2      How to build a symphony? A workshop on Mahler's First Symphony**

A collaborative, educational project between orchestras and schools based on **Mahler's First Symphony**, a composition "haunted" by the *Wunderhorn* melodies, nursery rhymes and Mahler's own memories of his childhood. The workshop has two parallel actions:

- a) school children are invited by a symphony orchestra to the rehearsals and preparation process of **Mahler's First**, in the spirit of Bernstein's "Young People's Concert". The conductor, in collaboration with (music) teachers, goes through the symphony as 'building blocks' of sound, and introduces young people to the intricate universe of Mahler's musical atmospheres and landscapes.
- b) Young people are invited to engage with creative projects that come out of their experience with the rehearsal process and Mahler's music. This could be paintings, animation, sculptures, collages etc., which are then used as material for a large-scale video installation, executed by experienced video designers, to be used in the actual performance of **Mahler's First**. The video installation will be interactive with the music, creating a truly synesthetic experience for the audience.

### **Event 3      Performance 1: *Des Knaben Wunderhorn***

A staged performance of the songs by Mahler for two soloists and orchestra, in which the protagonists, apart from the two soloists, will be children from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. A series of workshops aimed to provide theatre, dance and music skills to the group will develop in fully fledged rehearsals for *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. The performance

will be a fantasy stage-world dominated by children, which will trace the existential journey from an initial anarchy and playfulness into struggle, irony and troubled faith. The workshops and rehearsals will be led by a group of educators and the artistic team and will use the children's experiences and intuitions about the music and the texts to create a brand-new dramaturgy for this highly enigmatic collection. Not only will the children go through a vibrant artistic and educational process, but they will also collaborate with the soloists, the conductor and the orchestra as true artists.

#### **Event 4**      **Performance 2: *The Captive Voice***

A unique, staged version of two contrasting, but oddly complementary song-cycles, Gustav Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* and George Crumb's *Ancient Voices of Children*. Using the theme of childhood and its endless representational modalities and transmutations as a dramaturgical arch, the performance aims to explore the mysticism of childhood, the anarchic machinations of children's imagination, and the adult grief that emanates from childhood memories and traumas. The two cycles will take place in two distinct, yet interconnected spaces, each hosting two different visions of the experience of childhood. In the case of the Mahler cycle, the protagonist is the adult who weaves a narrative of loss, memory and atonement, whereas in the case of the Crumb cycle, the core becomes the cryptic experience of childhood itself that invades the space. This dialogue between the two works aims to bring to the fore the bold theme of childhood, so often neglected in the contemporary performance arts, and navigate through a kaleidoscope of images, actions, ideas and emotions that subvert the assumed stability of adulthood.

#### **Event 5**      ***New Songs of the Earth: A workshop on the future of Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde***

A workshop aimed at teenagers and young adults on probably the most enigmatic composition by Mahler. The shadow of the death of his own daughter is transfigured in a volatile hymn to nature, death, eternity and beauty, where melancholy is juxtaposed with orgiastic happiness and irony. Using the main themes of the symphony as material, small groups of teenagers and young adults, in collaboration with educators, composers and poets create their own *Song of the Earth*, songs for the 21<sup>st</sup> century which open a dialogue with Mahler's music and the future of this planet. The workshop needs to take place in various

sites around the world, bringing in as much cultural diversity as possible. The performances will all be streamed live in a simultaneous, wild festival of music and poetry throughout the world.