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Mahler

Symphony no.9

The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra

Leonard Bernstein





Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)
Symphony no. 9 in D major

CD 1

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| 1. I. Andante comodo | 29:27 |
| 2. II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers | 16:43 |

CD 2

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|------------------------|-------|
| 1. III. Rondo Burleske | 12:07 |
| 2. IV. Adagio | 30:15 |

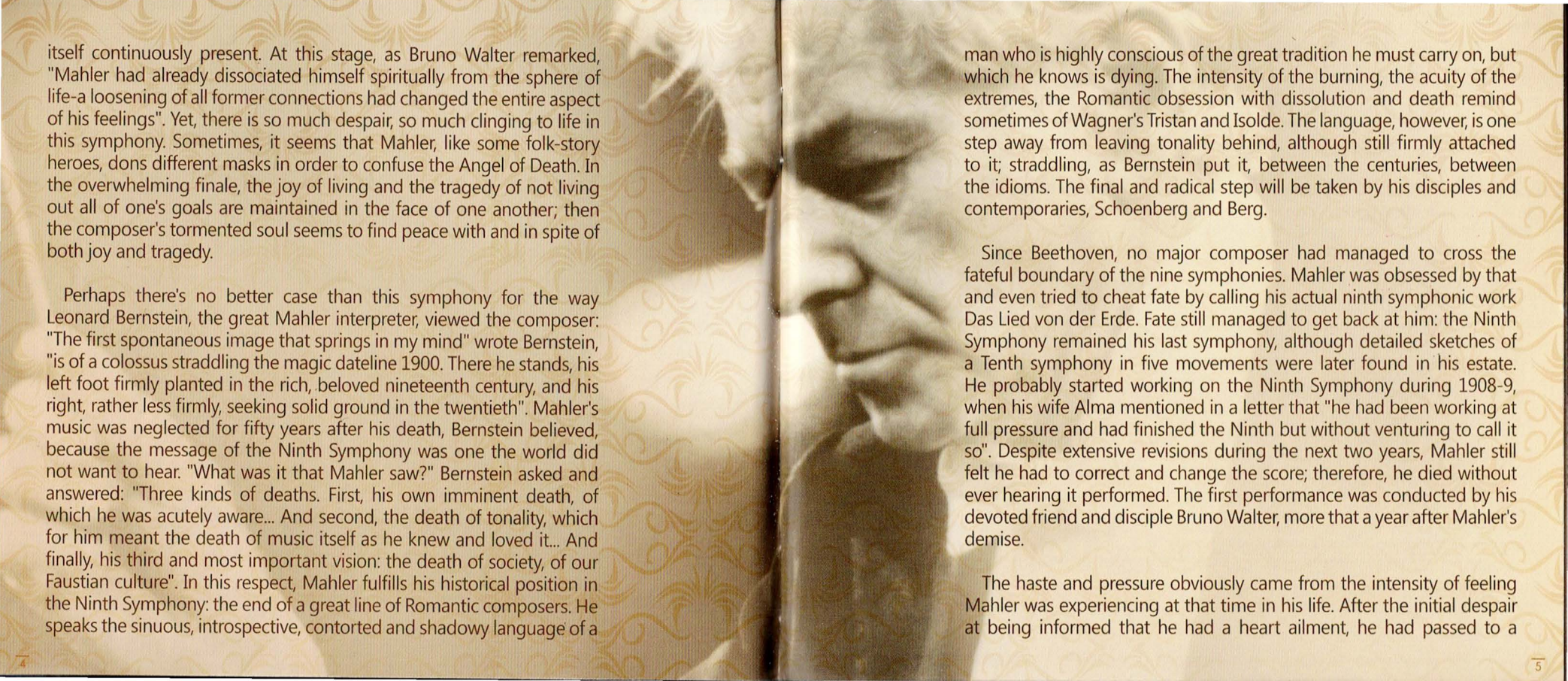
The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra
LEONARD BERNSTEIN

Recorded live at the Mann Auditorium, Tel-Aviv 25.8.1985

Symphony no. 9 in D major

A few weeks before his death in May 1911, Mahler set forth on his last journey from Paris to his beloved (and often hated) Vienna. He was returning there after almost three years in New York, where he had been Music Director of both the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic. He was going back home to die. Ken Russell's film *Mahler* is built around this symbolic journey. On the train, Mahler meets a strange aristocratic black lady who tells him: "It's a privilege to meet someone who knows all about it". Bemused and ironic, the composer asks if she means the music of the spheres. "No", comes the curt answer, "I mean death". Cut. Mahler obviously cannot stand the subject and attempts to leave. "Your latest symphony, the Ninth", she continues emphatically, "it's all about death: death - the pitiless enemy, death - the joker... even death - the lover!".

In the film, Mahler doesn't admit to the "charge", but in light of the spiritual autobiography that is his entire creation, one cannot but accept this as a fact. The works of Mahler's New York years - *Das Lied von der Erde*, the Ninth Symphony and the sketches of the unfinished Tenth, all written after he was diagnosed with a serious heart condition, bear witness to his turmoil and resignation in the face of death. He had always been a tormented, metaphysical soul in search of the meaning of life, and capable of expressing his probing into life, death, Nature and the human spirit only through music. The awareness of Death actually looming, closely, changed his perspective: a sense of being near the end (or an attempt to dismiss, accept or transmute this feeling) makes



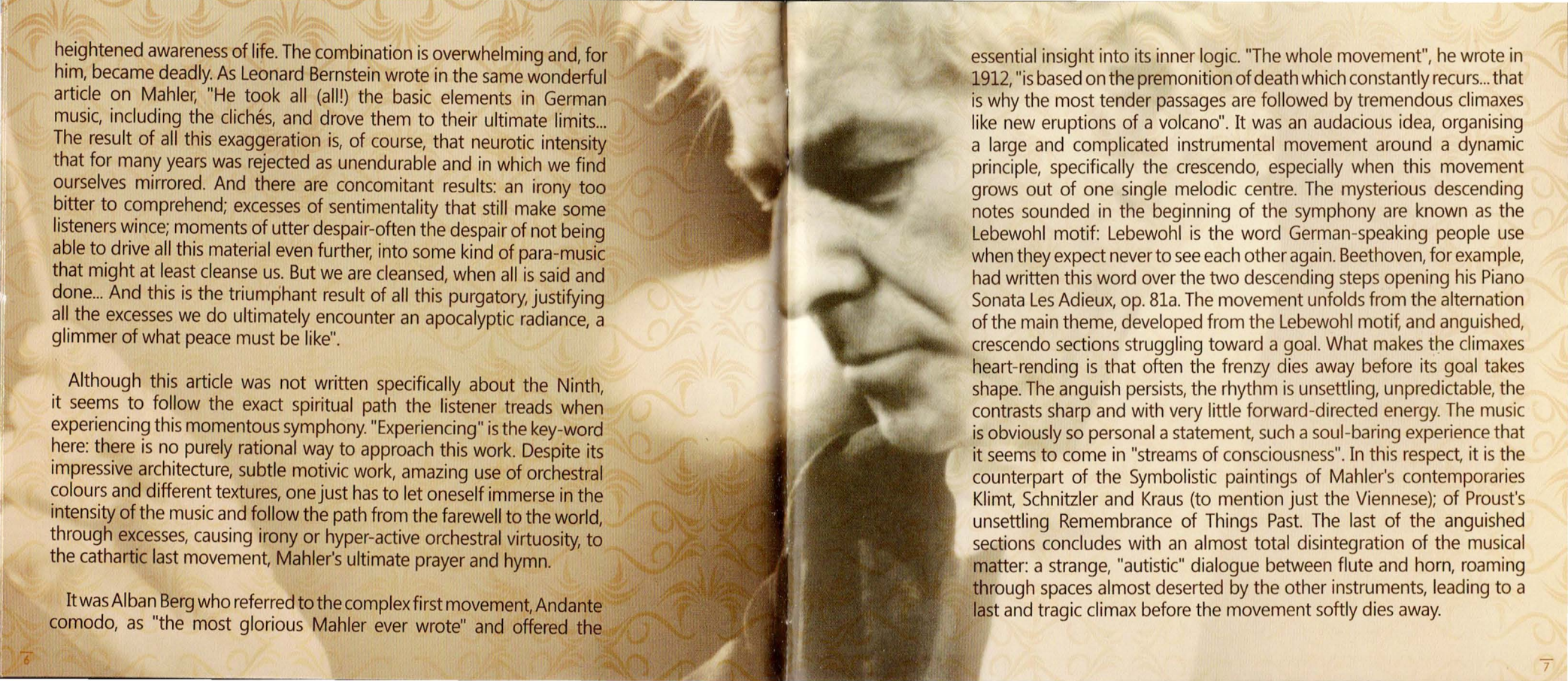
itself continuously present. At this stage, as Bruno Walter remarked, "Mahler had already dissociated himself spiritually from the sphere of life—a loosening of all former connections had changed the entire aspect of his feelings". Yet, there is so much despair, so much clinging to life in this symphony. Sometimes, it seems that Mahler, like some folk-story heroes, dons different masks in order to confuse the Angel of Death. In the overwhelming finale, the joy of living and the tragedy of not living out all of one's goals are maintained in the face of one another; then the composer's tormented soul seems to find peace with and in spite of both joy and tragedy.

Perhaps there's no better case than this symphony for the way Leonard Bernstein, the great Mahler interpreter, viewed the composer: "The first spontaneous image that springs in my mind" wrote Bernstein, "is of a colossus straddling the magic dateline 1900. There he stands, his left foot firmly planted in the rich, beloved nineteenth century, and his right, rather less firmly, seeking solid ground in the twentieth". Mahler's music was neglected for fifty years after his death, Bernstein believed, because the message of the Ninth Symphony was one the world did not want to hear. "What was it that Mahler saw?" Bernstein asked and answered: "Three kinds of deaths. First, his own imminent death, of which he was acutely aware... And second, the death of tonality, which for him meant the death of music itself as he knew and loved it... And finally, his third and most important vision: the death of society, of our Faustian culture". In this respect, Mahler fulfills his historical position in the Ninth Symphony: the end of a great line of Romantic composers. He speaks the sinuous, introspective, contorted and shadowy language of a

man who is highly conscious of the great tradition he must carry on, but which he knows is dying. The intensity of the burning, the acuity of the extremes, the Romantic obsession with dissolution and death remind sometimes of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*. The language, however, is one step away from leaving tonality behind, although still firmly attached to it; straddling, as Bernstein put it, between the centuries, between the idioms. The final and radical step will be taken by his disciples and contemporaries, Schoenberg and Berg.

Since Beethoven, no major composer had managed to cross the fateful boundary of the nine symphonies. Mahler was obsessed by that and even tried to cheat fate by calling his actual ninth symphonic work *Das Lied von der Erde*. Fate still managed to get back at him: the Ninth Symphony remained his last symphony, although detailed sketches of a Tenth symphony in five movements were later found in his estate. He probably started working on the Ninth Symphony during 1908-9, when his wife Alma mentioned in a letter that "he had been working at full pressure and had finished the Ninth but without venturing to call it so". Despite extensive revisions during the next two years, Mahler still felt he had to correct and change the score; therefore, he died without ever hearing it performed. The first performance was conducted by his devoted friend and disciple Bruno Walter, more that a year after Mahler's demise.

The haste and pressure obviously came from the intensity of feeling Mahler was experiencing at that time in his life. After the initial despair at being informed that he had a heart ailment, he had passed to a

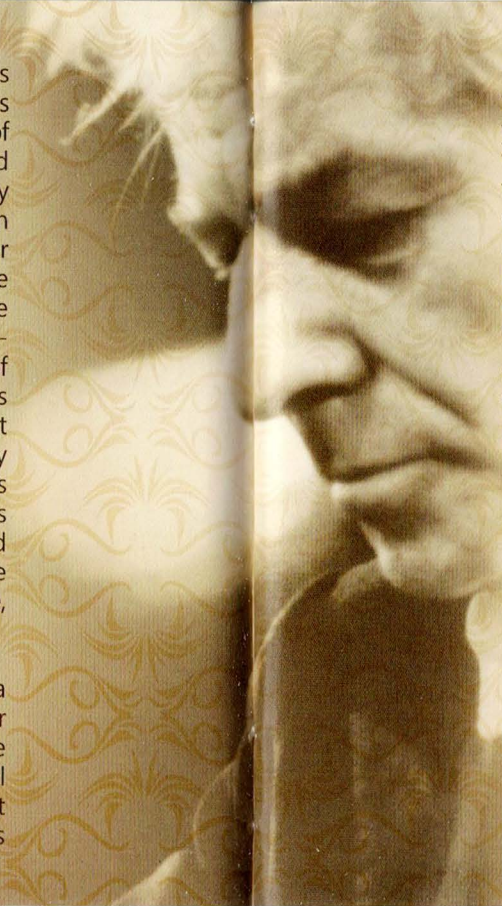


heightened awareness of life. The combination is overwhelming and, for him, became deadly. As Leonard Bernstein wrote in the same wonderful article on Mahler, "He took all (all!) the basic elements in German music, including the clichés, and drove them to their ultimate limits... The result of all this exaggeration is, of course, that neurotic intensity that for many years was rejected as unendurable and in which we find ourselves mirrored. And there are concomitant results: an irony too bitter to comprehend; excesses of sentimentality that still make some listeners wince; moments of utter despair—often the despair of not being able to drive all this material even further, into some kind of para-music that might at least cleanse us. But we are cleansed, when all is said and done... And this is the triumphant result of all this purgatory, justifying all the excesses we do ultimately encounter an apocalyptic radiance, a glimmer of what peace must be like".

Although this article was not written specifically about the Ninth, it seems to follow the exact spiritual path the listener treads when experiencing this momentous symphony. "Experiencing" is the key-word here: there is no purely rational way to approach this work. Despite its impressive architecture, subtle motivic work, amazing use of orchestral colours and different textures, one just has to let oneself immerse in the intensity of the music and follow the path from the farewell to the world, through excesses, causing irony or hyper-active orchestral virtuosity, to the cathartic last movement, Mahler's ultimate prayer and hymn.

It was Alban Berg who referred to the complex first movement, *Andante comodo*, as "the most glorious Mahler ever wrote" and offered the

essential insight into its inner logic. "The whole movement", he wrote in 1912, "is based on the premonition of death which constantly recurs... that is why the most tender passages are followed by tremendous climaxes like new eruptions of a volcano". It was an audacious idea, organising a large and complicated instrumental movement around a dynamic principle, specifically the crescendo, especially when this movement grows out of one single melodic centre. The mysterious descending notes sounded in the beginning of the symphony are known as the *Lebewohl* motif: *Lebewohl* is the word German-speaking people use when they expect never to see each other again. Beethoven, for example, had written this word over the two descending steps opening his Piano Sonata *Les Adieux*, op. 81a. The movement unfolds from the alternation of the main theme, developed from the *Lebewohl* motif, and anguished, crescendo sections struggling toward a goal. What makes the climaxes heart-rending is that often the frenzy dies away before its goal takes shape. The anguish persists, the rhythm is unsettling, unpredictable, the contrasts sharp and with very little forward-directed energy. The music is obviously so personal a statement, such a soul-baring experience that it seems to come in "streams of consciousness". In this respect, it is the counterpart of the Symbolistic paintings of Mahler's contemporaries Klimt, Schnitzler and Kraus (to mention just the Viennese); of Proust's unsettling *Remembrance of Things Past*. The last of the anguished sections concludes with an almost total disintegration of the musical matter: a strange, "autistic" dialogue between flute and horn, roaming through spaces almost deserted by the other instruments, leading to a last and tragic climax before the movement softly dies away.



The second and third movements are the masks he chooses, perhaps to elude the Angel of Death. A comparison was made by some critics with the old German woodcuts and engravings called Totentanz of Dances of Death with grinning skeletons in different friendly and unfriendly guises. Here is Death the fiddler of the dance, in a burly, heavy Ländler of such simple design that it can only be satirical. The common satirical intent of the two middle movements was interpreted by another critic in contrast with the metaphysical first and last movements: "The Ländler and the Rondo-Burleske allude to the kind of activities-the whirl of life symbolised by the Strauss waltz and the Lehar operetta-that people use to occupy themselves and hide the ultimate futility of life behind a façade of apparently meaningful commotion. He exposes these activities to caricature and shows how helpless they are to resist such distortion...". The Rondo-Burleske is wild and defiant, extremely complex in its contrapuntal texture, "a movement of burning scorn", as it was called. Yet, in an extended episode in its middle a noble, generous theme which had also been heard in the first movement appears, based on the Lebewohl motif. It is the theme that would generate the entire Finale of the symphony and its spirit already enriches the grotesque, sarcastic third movement.

The Adagio seems to leave any earthly dimensions and soars to a space of beauty and intensity that can seldom be found in any other music. It thus becomes the true climax of the symphony, the place where, according to Bruno Walter, "Mahler peacefully bids farewell to the world". Peace is relative here, when life has such luxuriant colours, death can hardly be accepted in peace. And the colours of this

movement are indeed incandescent. The unfolding, in ever-changing textures and situations, of the Lebewohl motif developed into a tragic, yearning theme reaches heights where "sublime" remains the only word to be used. The thinner texture is one of the prominent elements here: the instruments utter their prolonged phrases, gather slowly in climaxes of warm, enveloping sound but also in peaks of single sound where agony prevails. It sometimes seems that the soundless shriek in Eduard Munch's famous painting was endowed with sound, for a few seconds of intense, dramatic probing into the innermost depths of despair, the "loosening of all connections" that Bruno Walter had referred to. Peace and reconciliation return and the movement slowly disintegrates, dying away "like the melting of a cloud into the ethereal blue". Bruno Walter's poetic insight may indeed help us reconcile with the tragic message Mahler sent posterity, almost from beyond the grave.

Dana Schlanger

Leonard Bernstein (August 25, 1918 - October 14, 1990)

Leonard Bernstein was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts. He took piano lessons as a boy and attended the Garrison and Boston Latin Schools. At Harvard University, he studied with Walter Piston, Edward Burlingame-Hill, and A. Tillman Merritt, among others. Before graduating in 1939, he made an unofficial conducting debut with his own incidental music to "The Birds", and directed and performed in Marc Blitzstein's "The Cradle Will Rock". Then at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, he studied piano with Isabella Vengerova, conducting with Fritz Reiner, and orchestration with Randall Thompson.

In 1940, he studied at The Boston Symphony Orchestra's newly created summer institute, Tanglewood, with the orchestra's conductor, Serge Koussevitzky. Bernstein later became Koussevitzky's conducting assistant.

Bernstein was appointed to his first permanent conducting post in 1943, as Assistant Conductor of the New York Philharmonic. On November 14, 1943, Bernstein substituted at a few hours notice for the ailing Bruno Walter at a Carnegie Hall concert, which was broadcast nationally on radio, receiving critical acclaim. Soon orchestras worldwide sought him out as a guest conductor.

In 1945 he was appointed Music Director of The New York City Symphony Orchestra, a post he held until 1947. After Serge Koussevitzky

died in 1951, Bernstein headed the orchestral and conducting departments at Tanglewood, teaching there for many years. In 1951 he married the Chilean actress and pianist, Felicia Montealegre. He was also visiting music professor, and head of the Creative Arts Festivals at Brandeis University in the early 1950s.

Bernstein became Music Director of The New York Philharmonic in 1958. From then until 1969 he led more concerts with the orchestra than any previous conductor. He subsequently held the lifetime title of Laureate Conductor, making frequent guest appearances with the orchestra. More than half of Bernstein's 400-plus recordings were made with The New York Philharmonic.

Bernstein traveled the world as a conductor. Immediately after World War II, in 1946, he conducted in London and at the International Music Festival in Prague. In 1947 he conducted in Tel Aviv, beginning a relationship with Israel that lasted until his death. In 1953, Bernstein was the first American to conduct opera at the Teatro alla Scala in Milan: Cherubini's "Medea" with Maria Callas.

Bernstein was a leading advocate of American composers, particularly Aaron Copland. The two remained close friends for life. As a young pianist, Bernstein performed Copland's "Piano Variations" so often he considered the composition his trademark. Bernstein programmed and recorded nearly all of the Copland orchestral works - many of them twice. He devoted several televised "Young People's Concerts" to Copland, and

gave the premiere of Copland's "Connotations", commissioned for the opening of Philharmonic Hall (now Avery Fisher Hall) at Lincoln Center in 1962.

While Bernstein's conducting repertoire encompassed the standard literature, he may be best remembered for his performances and recordings of Haydn, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Sibelius and Mahler. Particularly notable were his performances of the Mahler symphonies with The New York Philharmonic in the 1960s, sparking a renewed interest in the works of Mahler.

Inspired by his Jewish heritage, Bernstein completed his first large-scale work: Symphony No.1: "Jeremiah". (1943). The piece was first performed with The Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra in 1944, conducted by the composer, and received the New York Music Critics' Award. Koussevitzky premiered Bernstein's Symphony No.2: "The Age of Anxiety" with The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Bernstein as piano soloist. His Symphony No.3: "Kaddish", composed in 1963, was premiered by The Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. "Kaddish" is dedicated "To the Beloved Memory of John F. Kennedy".

Other major compositions by Bernstein include "Prelude, Fugue and Riffs" for solo clarinet and jazz ensemble (1949); "Serenade" for violin, strings and percussion (1954); "Symphonic Dances from West Side Story" (1960); "Chichester Psalms" for chorus, boy soprano and orchestra (1965); "Mass: A Theater Piece for Singers, Players and Dancers", commissioned for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts

in Washington, DC, and first produced there in 1971; "Songfest" a song cycle for six singers and orchestra (1977); "Divertimento" for orchestra (1980); "Halil" for solo flute and small orchestra (1981); "Touches" for solo piano (1981); "Missa Brevis" for singers and percussion (1988); "Thirteen Anniversaries" for solo piano (1988); "Concerto for Orchestra: Jubilee Games" (1989); and "Arias and Barcarolles" for two singers and piano duet (1988).

Bernstein also wrote a one-act opera, "Trouble in Tahiti" in 1952, and its sequel, the three-act opera, "A Quiet Place" in 1983. He collaborated with choreographer Jerome Robbins on three major ballets: "Fancy Free" (1944) and "Facsimile" (1946) for the American Ballet theater; and "Dybbuk" (1975) for the New York City Ballet. He composed the score for the award-winning movie "On the Waterfront" (1954) and incidental music for two Broadway plays: "Peter Pan" (1950) and "The Lark" (1955).

Bernstein contributed substantially to the Broadway musical stage. He collaborated with Betty Comden and Adolph Green on "On The Town" (1944) and "Wonderful Town" (1953). In collaboration with Richard Wilbur and Lillian Hellman and others he wrote "Candide" (1956). Other versions of "Candide" were written in association with Hugh Wheeler, Stephen Sondheim et al. In 1957 he again collaborated with Jerome Robbins, Stephen Sondheim, and Arthur Laurents, on the landmark musical "West Side Story", also made into the Academy Award-winning film. In 1976 Bernstein and Alan Jay Lerner wrote "1600 Pennsylvania Avenue".

Festivals of Bernstein's music have been produced throughout the world. In 1978 The Israel Philharmonic sponsored a festival commemorating his years of dedication to Israel. The Israel Philharmonic also bestowed on him the lifetime title of Laureate Conductor in 1988. In 1986 The London Symphony Orchestra and the Barbican Centre produced a Bernstein Festival. The London Symphony Orchestra in 1987 named him Honorary President. In 1989 the city of Bonn presented a Beethoven/Bernstein Festival.

In 1985 The National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences honored Mr. Bernstein with the Lifetime Achievement Grammy Award. He won eleven Emmy Awards in his career. His televised concert and lecture series started with the "Omnibus" program in 1954, followed by the extraordinary "Young People's Concerts with The New York Philharmonic" in 1958 that extended over fourteen seasons. Among his many appearances on the PBS series "Great Performances" was the eleven-part acclaimed "Bernstein's Beethoven". In 1989, Bernstein and others commemorated the 1939 invasion of Poland in a worldwide telecast from Warsaw.

Bernstein's writings were published in "The Joy of Music" (1959), "Leonard Bernstein's Young People's Concerts" (1961), "The Infinite Variety of Music" (1966), and "Findings" (1982). Each has been widely translated. He gave six lectures at Harvard University in 1972-1973 as the Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry. These lectures were subsequently published and televised as "The Unanswered Question".

Bernstein always rejoiced in opportunities to teach young musicians. His master classes at Tanglewood were famous. He was instrumental in founding the Los Angeles Philharmonic Institute in 1982. He helped create a world class training orchestra at the Schleswig Holstein Music Festival. He founded the Pacific Music Festival in Sapporo, Japan. Modeled after Tanglewood, this international festival was the first of its kind in Asia and continues to this day.

Bernstein received many honors. He was elected in 1981 to the American Academy of Arts and Letters, which gave him a Gold Medal. The National Fellowship Award in 1985 applauded his life-long support of humanitarian causes. He received the MacDowell Colony's Gold Medal; medals from the Beethoven Society and the Mahler Gesellschaft; the Handel Medallion, New York City's highest honor for the arts; a Tony award (1969) for Distinguished Achievement in the Theater; and dozens of honorary degrees and awards from colleges and universities. He was presented ceremonial keys to the cities of Oslo, Vienna, Be'er Sheva and the village of Bernstein, Austria, among others. National honors came from Italy, Israel, Mexico, Denmark, Germany (the Great Merit Cross), and France (Chevalier, Officer and Commandeur of the Legion d'Honneur). He received the Kennedy Center Honors in 1980.

World peace was a particular concern of Bernstein's. Speaking at Johns Hopkins University in 1980 and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York in 1983, he described his vision of global harmony. His "Journey for Peace" tour to Athens and Hiroshima with the European

Community Orchestra in 1985 commemorated the 40th anniversary of the atom bomb. In December 1989, Bernstein conducted the historic "Berlin Celebration Concerts" on both sides of the Berlin Wall, as it was being dismantled. The concerts were unprecedented gestures of cooperation, the musicians representing the former East Germany, West Germany, and the four powers that had partitioned Berlin after World War II.

Bernstein supported Amnesty International from its inception. To benefit the effort in 1987, he established the Felicia Montealegre Fund in memory of his wife who died in 1978.

In 1990, Bernstein received the Praemium Imperiale, an international prize created in 1988 by the Japan Arts Association and awarded for lifetime achievement in the arts. Bernstein used the \$100,000 prize to establish The Bernstein Education Through the Arts (BETA) Fund, Inc. before his death on October 14, 1990.

Bernstein was the father of three children: Jamie, Alexander, and Nina. and the grandfather of four: Francisca, Evan, Anya and Anna.

Israel Evening News 26/8/1985

By Hans E. Pringsheim

A tremendous ovation from a capacity audience welcomed Leonard Bernstein as he appeared on the stage of NHK Hall Sunday night to conduct the first Tokyo concert of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra's current Japan tour.

The single work on the program was Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony in D major, which brought the lifework of the last great symphony composer of the classic-romantic era to its towering conclusion. Bernstein selected this symphony as the most important work on the present tour's repertory, to mark the 125th anniversary of Mahler's birth and the 25th anniversary of his own conducting of a Mahler cycle.

Among Mahler's Nine Symphonies, the Ninth stands out in several ways. It has none of the joyful character of the earlier works, mainly up to the Fifth; it returns to the classical four-movement pattern, in the slow-fast-fast-slow sequence. It is written for orchestra only, without vocal solo or chorus, unlike the Second, Third, Fourth, Eighth, and the "Lied von der Erde," which he called a "symphony for two voices with orchestra," but avoided calling it his

"Ninth," an ominous title associated with the finality of the last symphony of Beethoven as well as Bruckner.

But already the "Lied von der Erde" was for Mahler a work of farewell, clearly so from the title of its last movement, and when he wrote the Ninth and called it so, he knew that his end was near; he died, at the age of 51, without hearing it performed.

Leonard Bernstein, one of the great Mahler conductors of the present era, presented this symphony with penetrating insight into its musical and emotional depth, from the opening Andante con Moto, a pioneering piece of 20th century musical modernism, to the ruddy simplicity of the Laendler-type Scherzo, the ragged Rondo-Burlesque, and the serene Adagio finale, which spells out a dolorous farewell.

The Israel Philharmonic, a large orchestra composed of excellent players at each and every desk, carried out the conductor's intention and interpretation to perfection in an impressive demonstration of full devotion to a joint musical task. The audience, after allowing for a brief period of breathless silence to

let the final ethereal pianissimo fade away, responded with an outburst of ovations which lasted for some 20 minutes, calling Bernstein back on the stage time and again.





Bernstein conducting
The IPO in 1948
at Be'er Sheva desert





