

Mahler Symphony 4

With this symphony, as with many of his works, Mahler continued to make alterations right up to the end of his life. The edition most easily available is Kalmus which is the 1910 edition (although it wrongly says it is 1906). The edition which gives Mahler's final thoughts on the work (which were not published during his lifetime) is Universal and these parts are sadly rather expensive to hire. In the main the changes were quite small - subtle changes in dynamics, the removal or addition of a few notes here and there. There are one or two more significant changes, such as an additional tempo instruction, or some actual note changes.

I'll now look at some particular parts of the symphony.

1. 1st Movement: Bars 3-4

There are a surprising number of things to say about these few notes! Firstly, notice that Mahler uses both Italian and German instructions. The latter predominate throughout the symphony. In fact it's almost necessary to have a glossary of German terms for this piece. Secondly, notice Mahler's fingering (wind players please don't switch off!). The F# has a 4th finger and the following G a 2nd. That means that you slide the 2nd finger up from the D it is on (the first note) to the G a fourth above. This is indicated by the line between the F# and the G. The slide will be played just before the second note. Mahler writes a good number of these markings into the string parts. Is his intention to limit portamenti to those moments, or are other places where he would have expected it without the need to mark it? Either way, portamento is something that all string players need to practice to play Mahler well.

Etwas zurückhaltend *Recht gemächlich (Haupttempo)*

grazioso *p* *pp* *espress.*

2. 1st Movement: Bar 3-7

This tune is in particular responsible for leading some to speak of this symphony as Mahler's Classical Symphony. It certainly has a classical feel. Very clearly in G major with no modulation. It even has a classical style appoggiatura in the 3rd bar. But this is certainly not Mahler trying to write classical music, he is doing this for a very specific reason: he described this theme as being 'childlike, simple, and entirely non self-conscious' - very similar to the way he asks the soprano to sing in the last movement. The words there are of a child explaining what heavenly life is like. The classical simplicity (for the moment at any rate) is derived from the subject Mahler has set himself - life after death.

3. 1st Movement: Bar 27

The way in which Mahler treats dynamics is very far from world of Haydn and Mozart. Here is a simple example. The top two staves are the woodwind, the lower two the strings. They play exactly the same chords, but the *fp* is in a different place. Mahler is playing with the colours he can get from an orchestra. This is difficult to achieve, given the large string sections employed by symphony orchestras - perhaps smaller sections would aid this type of balancing problem.

4. 1st Movement: Bars 115-9

The feeling of jolliness in this movement is only superficial. Here the first violins play an extraordinarily neurotic line. All is not well in Paradise!

5. 1st Movement: Bars 224-8

Here, in the 3rd trumpet part, Mahler makes a reference forward to the beginning of his 5th Symphony – this looking forwards (or backwards) is a technique he used a good number of times in his works.



6. 1st Movement: Bars 292f

Mahler used commas in two ways. Sometimes they show phrasing (i.e. the note before is shortened), and sometimes, as here, they indicate a small break in the flow of the music (he sometimes uses the German word *Luftpause*).



2nd Movement

This movement is something of a *Todtentanz* (dance of death) in which a solo violin, tuned a tone higher than normal, weaves a devilish tune. For all Mahler's innovations it is perhaps surprising to note that its structure is very regular.

7. 2nd Movement: Bars 6-10

Here is the opening gambit of the solo violin. Note that it will sound in the key of Eb, not Db as it is written. Notice the dynamic surges which give it a wild feel. The instructions mean 'Driven (like a fiddle)'. Undoubtedly Mahler is not after refinement here but an affect. For that reason I would suggest the player use an open E string (a very rare thing to do) giving a brasher, and more rustic feel (surely implied by the word *Fidel*).



8. 2nd Movement: Bars 9

The second section of this movement is a *ländler*. That is a triple-time dance of Austrian origin, thought to be the forerunner of the waltz. It is however of a more rustic nature, and without the anticipated second beat so characteristic of the Viennese waltz. Here Mahler does the *ländler* in his own style by giving it 3 bar phrases. The opening bar (for the 1st clarinet) is a kind of 'Get Ready!' signal to the 'dancers'. This needs playing with real precision, and just a touch of swagger!

9. 2nd Movement: Bar 34-6

In the same Ländler section Mahler marks the 2nd and 3rd clarinets to hold the ends of their instruments up high - 'bells up' (Schalltr. Auf). It's both to give extra volume and also to add a small 'choreographic' element to the proceedings. Mahler also uses this marking at times for oboes, horns, and trumpets.

10. 2nd Movement: Bar 332-5

Towards the end of the movement Mahler wonderfully underlines its 'devilish' tone. Over a pedal C he gives the horns a fanfare in Gb. He thus emphasises a tritone - the *diabolus in music* (devil in music)!

3rd Movement

This movement is marked 'Ruhevoll (Poco Adagio)'. Mahler was also known to speak of it as an Andante. What is crucial is that this is not self-indulgent music, but music which flows and sings.

11. 3rd Movement: 1-6

The cellos have the tune at the opening (see the word *espress*). However the dynamic is *p* or *pp* and the mood is peaceful, so I would suggest that only a small amount of vibrato is required.

The image shows the first six measures of the 3rd movement for cellos and double basses. The top staff is for cellos and the bottom staff is for double basses. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The cellos play a melodic line with long, flowing phrases, marked *pp espress. sehr gesangvoll* in the first measure, *p* in the second, and *pp espress.* in the third. The double basses play a supporting line, marked *pizz* and *p* in the first measure.

12. 3rd Movement: 89ff/97ff

Again the heavenly peacefulness is broken - this time by painful reminiscences of earthly life. Did I mention that this is all about life after death? Here the trumpet and then the horn play painful descending chromatic scales.

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is for a trumpet and the bottom staff is for a horn. Both staves feature descending chromatic scales. The trumpet part starts with a *ff* dynamic and ends with a *dim* dynamic. The horn part starts with a *p* dynamic and features a series of descending chromatic scales.

13. 3rd Movement: 278-83

Quite how Mahler takes us to the circus I'll leave you to discover ... but as abruptly as we arrive we are taken away again! The instruction is to change the tempo suddenly, with no prior slowing (something that happens several times in the movement).

15. 4th Movement: Bars 36-9

In keeping with the heavenly references (here to St Peter) Mahler interjects a chorale-like phrase at several points.

The image shows a musical score for bars 36-9 of the 4th movement. It consists of three staves: a vocal line in the top staff, a piano accompaniment in the middle staff, and a bass line in the bottom staff. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with a *pp* dynamic and the lyrics "Sanct Pe - ter im Himm - el sieht zu". A long slur covers the vocal line and the piano accompaniment across all three staves. The piano accompaniment starts with a *pp* dynamic and features a series of chords and single notes.

16. 4th Movement: Bars 60ff

Mahler said of this movement "What I had in mind here was unbelievably difficult to do. Imagine the uniform blue of the skies, which is more difficult to paint than all the changing and contrasting shades. This is the fundamental mood of the whole. Only sometimes it darkens and becomes ghostly, gruesome. But heaven itself is not darkened, it shines on in an eternal blue. Only to us it suddenly seems gruesome, just as on the most beautiful day in the woods, flooded with light, we are often gripped by a panic and fear." Mahler interjects the sleighbell motif from the first movement between sections of this movement. In the first movement it was something of a care-free and light-hearted call to play, but here it has become much more sinister, with stopped horns, muted trumpets and col legno strings (hitting the strings with the wood of the bow rather than the hair).

The image shows a musical score for bars 60ff of the 4th movement. It consists of two staves, both in treble clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 4/4. The top staff begins with a *f* dynamic and features a series of chords and single notes. The bottom staff begins with a *ff* dynamic and features a series of chords and single notes. The score is characterized by a dense, rhythmic texture.