

Gabriel Feltz Dirigent
PRESSESTIMMEN | Mahler 8. Sinfonie

Online Merker / 04.07.2018

Viele Soli einzelner Instrumente zeigten die Qualität des Orchesters. Eindrucksvoll geriet der Übergang von Harfen, Klavier, Celesta, Harmonium und den pp-Flöten zum Beginn des „chorus myticus. Hier konnten die Chöre mit „Alles Vergängliche...“ ihre Kunst des ganz leisen Singens – „wie ein Hauch“ schreibt Mahler – beweisen. Umso stärker geriet dann dynamisch und akustisch die Steigerung aller Chöre und des Orchesters bis zum fff-„Hinan“. Nachdem wie zum Ende des ersten Teils von oben hinter dem Publikum Trompeten und Posaunen die Es-Dur-Schlußakkorde des Orchesters verstärkten, brauchte das überwältigte Publikum im ausverkauften Haus erst eine kurze Pause der Besinnung, bevor Beifall und Bravos, schon bald stehend, alle Mitwirkenden, Sänger, Chöre, hier zu Recht wieder besonders den Knabenchor, das riesige Orchester und den Leiter der Aufführung feierten.
Sigi Brockmann

Das Opernmagazin / 07.07.2018

Gabriel Feltz in erster Linie wird es zu verdanken sein, dass diese beiden Aufführungen von Mahlers 8. Sinfonie ganz sicher in das kollektive Dortmunder Konzertgedächtnis eingehen werden, als besondere Höhepunkte eines mittlerweile ebenfalls ganz besonderen Dirigenten von internationaler Klasse.

Detlef Obens

Ruhr Nachrichten / 04.07.2018

Sakrale Tiefe gab Feltz dem ersten Teil, wo er Klangmassen bewegte, ließ den mittelalterlichen Pfingsthymnus „Veni, Creator spiritus“ drängend musizieren und gewaltig klingen – laut, aber nicht mit durchgehend dröhnender Wucht. Und auch den zweiten Teil mit der Schlusszene aus Goethes Faust“ ertränkte Feltz in der Riesenbesetzung nicht in Schönheits-Emphase, sondern sorgte dort noch mehr für Differenzierungen. Und die vielen schönen, organischen Tempo-Übergänge des klug strukturierenden Dirigenten schweißten die episodenhafte Szene zur Einheit zusammen.

Julia Gaß

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MAHLER Symphony No. 8 • Gabriel Feltz, cond; Emily Newton, Michaela Kaune, Ashley Thouret (sop); Iris Vermillion, Mihoko Fujimura (alt); Brenden Patrick Gunnell (ten); Markus Eiche (bar); Karl-Heinz Lehner (bs); Czech P Ch; Slovak P Ch; Children's Ch of Dortmund Chorakademie; Dortmund PO • DREYER GAIDO 21118 (2 SACDs: 82:09) Live: 7/3–4/2018, Konzerthaus Dortmund

The first ten minutes of Part II of this enormous symphony tells a lot about the performance. Most of the big, climactic moments play themselves. But this opening *poco adagio* which is purely orchestral, very carefully scored by Mahler and very difficult to shape, is where I have heard even good conductors come to grief. The uninterrupted sense of direction and momentum provided by Gabriel Feltz is a very good indication of the overall quality of this recording. In his performance, as in few others, this section feels like a perfect mood setter for all that is to follow.

It was disarming to read Feltz's program notes in the accompanying booklet. He refers to a number of great recordings of this work (Bernstein, Solti, Horenstein, and Mitropoulos) that he clearly knows and admires. To his list I might add the live Tennstedt reading with the London Philharmonic. It is natural to wonder if this new entry really adds something that the marketplace requires. The answer is very firmly yes.

First, the SACD sound (heard in two-channel stereo) is spectacular. It has a full, solid bass and a clean, natural-sounding high frequency reproduction, perfectly balanced and transparent without being clinical. The Mahler Eighth is notoriously difficult to record, and the engineers did a splendid job.

The Dortmund Philharmonic may not be thought of in the same way we think of the world's great orchestras, but they are more than up to the task. Solo woodwind playing is particularly fine, as is the warm string tone. The orchestra plays with a concentration and a sense of ensemble that indicates that this occasion meant something to them. The recording has been edited from two consecutive live performances, and no edit joints are apparent even if you closely listen for them. The choral singing is lovely, fully engaged, and well balanced. The solo singers are all fine as well, particularly tenor Brenden Patrick Gunnell.

Of course, one can speak about the recording quality, the soloists, the choirs, and the orchestral playing, but an effective performance of Mahler's Eighth Symphony largely depends on the conductor's ability to give shape to this sprawling masterpiece. There are many sudden changes of tempo, mood, and color, all of which have to sound as if they belong in the same piece. Achieving that requires carefully judged tempo adjustments to avoid jerkiness, with particular attention to orchestral color and balance. Most importantly, it means shaping every phrase with intent; nothing can sound as if it is simply there to fill space before the next big moment.

Feltz passes all of these tests very well. I am not going to claim that this performance is preferable to the classic recordings noted above. Longtime *Fanfare* readers know that I have an allergy to ranking performances as if they were sports teams with win-lose records, and I am not certain that Feltz brings the stamp of a truly individual musical personality in the way those conductors do. What I will claim is that this recording can be mentioned in the same breath as the great ones because of the overall persuasiveness of the performance and the stunning sonic quality that it offers, a crucial component in the Mahler Eighth. As a very satisfying rendition this one can be recommended to all Mahlerians with confidence.

Henry Fogel

Four stars: A fine performance, splendidly recorded, of Mahler's gigantic 8th Symphony

Fanfare Magazine – December 2019

For all of its grandness and profundity, I've always considered Mahler's Eighth to be a musically inferior work. This recording made me realize what an underestimation that was.

I was unaware that many recordings of "Symphony of a Thousand" use only a fraction of this number of performers - even Bernstein's thunderous 1975 recording with the Vienna Phil used a significantly reduced ensemble of 320, making it chamber music by comparison. Of course, this makes practical sense, what with substantial budgets and restricted performance spaces coming at a premium, but I think it makes musical sense as well. More musicians can make tuning an issue, and as I found in the Bernstein recording in particular, it can muddle the thick polyphonic textures that dominate significant parts of this symphony.

Now, purists may scoff at such a blatant flouting of the composer's wishes, but they may wish to recall the origin of the symphony's title. Although yes, Mahler was fully aware of the fact that his masterpiece would require gargantuan forces, the moniker "Symphony of a Thousand" was not his creation - in fact, he disapproved of it - but rather an example of brilliant arts marketing. And hey, it worked; would you turn down the chance to hear a thousand musicians playing and singing at once? Mahler was, first and foremost, a highly developed musician who was not interested in spectacle for its own sake, and so defining the Eighth purely by its immensity does the work a great disservice. Whether it's a thousand or a fifth of that, it's the music, not the numbers, that has the final word.

And whatever the number of musicians, the fact remains that the *concept itself* of the Eighth is a big one. What we are hearing is a sort of Romantic "super-symphony", an almost caricaturesque summation of modern Western music - an astonishing feat, especially since it only took Mahler six weeks (!) to write. Yes, it is a symphony in the lineage of Beethoven, but the Eighth also captures the spirit of Baroque counterpoint, the romantic oratorio, and Wagnerian opera. Mahler further extends the symphony's scope into a meta-narrative that sets out to embrace the duality of human experience: the spiritual, in the form of a setting of the Latin "Veni creator"; and the secular, in the form of that ultimate expression of modern humanity that captured the musical imaginations of Spohr, Gounod, Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt, Wagner, and Boito: the final scene of Goethe's *Faust*. Go big or go home, as they say.

The Dortmund Philharmonic does a spectacular job in this recording of preserving the scope of Mahler's vision of "planets and suns revolving in their orbits" - the dense fugal counterpoint of the "Veni Creator" are clean as can be and thus somehow sound even more wonderfully intricate. The loud parts make a lot of noise, but it's a joyful noise, exquisitely executed - the final chorale of the symphony is simply hair-raising. Similarly, the soft music, like the extended orchestral interludes in the *Faust* section, is sensitively shaped, the colors and dynamics delicately shaded.

The "less is more" approach to this symphony clearly works, as many recordings have shown. And while the Eighth is one of Mahler's more elusive symphonies, this recording sharpens the piece's inherent simplicity and clarity. It's as if we are hearing Mahler, for one cosmic hour and a half, finally letting go and surrendering himself to the Creator spirit. *Veni creator*, indeed. Highly recommended. **Andrew Desiderio**

Five stars: Less is more, even in Mahler

"Feltz has a superb team of soloists, well contrasted and all in form, who come into their own in the recitatives and ariosos of Part 2, sensitively recorded and accompanied with telling orchestral detail that entices me to explore the rest of a fairly under-reported cycle."
Gramophone, March 2020, Peter Quantrill