

## Mahler

Symphony No. 2 in C minor,  
'Resurrection'.

**Christiane Oelze** (soprano); **Sarah Connolly** (mezzo); **MDR Rundfunkchor; Rundfunkchor Berlin; GewandhausChor; Gewandhausorchester Leipzig/Riccardo Chailly.**

**Accentus Music ACC20238** Also available on **Blu-ray ACC10238** (1 hour 36 minutes). Subtitles in English/French/German. Website [www.accentus.com](http://www.accentus.com). NTSC. 16:9. DVD 9. Region 0. PCM Stereo. Dolby Digital 5.1. DTS 5.1. DVD Director Henning Kasten. DVD Producers Paul Smaczny, Günter Atteln, Sven Freitag. Audio Producer Sebastian Braun. Audio Engineer Toine Mertens. Dates Live performances at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig on May 17th and 18th, 2011.



## Mahler

Symphony No. 8 in E flat,  
'Symphony of a Thousand'.

**Erika Sunnegårdh, Ricarda Merbeth, Christiane Oelze** (sopranos); **Lioba Braun, Gerhild Romberger** (mezzos); **Stephen Gould** (tenor); **Dietrich Henschel** (baritone); **Georg Zeppenfeld** (bass); **MDR Rundfunkchor; Chor der Opera Leipzig; GewandhausChor; Thomanerchor Leipzig; GewandhausKinderchor; Gewandhausorchester Leipzig/Riccardo Chailly.**

**Accentus Music ACC20222** Also available on **Blu-ray ACC10222** (1 hour 32 minutes). Subtitles in English/French/German. Website [www.accentus.com](http://www.accentus.com). NTSC. 16:9. DVD 9. Region 0. PCM Stereo. Dolby Digital 5.1. DTS 5.1. DVD Director Michael Beyer. DVD Producers Paul Smaczny, Günter Atteln, Sven Freitag. Audio Producer Sebastian Braun. Audio Engineer Toine Mertens. Dates Live performances at the Gewandhaus, Leipzig on May 26th and 27th, 2011.



### Comparisons:

*Symphony No. 2:*

Larsson, Gvazava, Orfeón Donostiarra, Lucerne Festival Orch/Abbado (EuroArts) 2053269 (2003, DVD)

*Symphony No. 8:*

Eaglen, Schwanewilms, Ziesak, Fulgoni, Larsson, Heppner, Mattei, Rootering, St Bavo Cath Boys' Ch, Breda Sacrament Ch, Prague Philharmonic Ch, Netherlands Rad Ch, Concertgebouw Orch/Chailly (Decca) 467 314-2 (2000, two CDs, rev. Apr 2001) Connell, Wiens, Lott, Denize, Schmidt, Versalle, Hynninen, Sotin, Tiffin School Boys' Ch, London Philharmonic Chor and Orch/Tennstedt (EMI Classics) 3 67743-9 (1991, two DVDs)

Riccardo Chailly has been at the forefront of Mahler interpreters for two decades, including a complete symphony cycle for Decca. While those performances are all highly polished and scrupulously judged, a few of them are also a little emotionally detached. That certainly isn't the case with these two concerts given at the Leipzig Gewandhaus in May 2011 during the city's International Mahler Festival. Chailly has grown in stature as a Mahler interpreter over the last decade and in both



these works his conducting has a concentration, attention to detail, expressive range and architectural strength that combine to make

these two of the most memorable Mahler performances of the 2011 anniversary year. The playing of the Gewandhaus Orchestra is another reason to acquire these DVDs: it's simply breathtaking, with finely characterized woodwind playing, brass that is suitably tremendous but never sounds overbearing and string playing that has a collective sonority of fabulous beauty where needed. The whole orchestra plays with an intensity and unanimity of purpose that produces unforgettable results.

The 'Resurrection' Symphony is given a wonderful performance, captured in DVD sound as fine as any I've heard. Chailly's pacing of the first movement is masterly, with fine rhythmic control, climaxes that register with maximum dramatic impact and an ability to create moments of tranquillity and repose without resorting to extravagantly slow speeds. All this results in a performance so unmannered and so faithful to Mahler's score that trying to describe it makes it sound less marvellous than it actually is. In the second movement, Chailly and his orchestra play the Ländler theme with bags of charm, but do so at a speed that flows easily and naturally, and the third movement is similarly excellent. Sarah Connolly is the rapt, intimate mezzo soloist in 'O Röschen rot', and the finale is glorious. Apart from one fleeting moment where the ensemble between offstage instruments and the main orchestra is fractionally imprecise, the playing is absolutely stunning, and Chailly's overall conception of the movement produces results of overwhelming cumulative power and cogency.

The combined forces of the MDR Radio Choir, Berlin Radio Choir and the Gewandhaus Chorus make a very fine choral contribution: their quiet first entry is magical, crowned by Christiane Oelze's bright and sensitive soprano – a fine partner to Connolly's mezzo. The musical splendour at the close, handled magnificently by Chailly, is an awe-inspiring song of joy and hope. Even in the hugest climaxes, every instrument seems to sing with an eloquence that mirrors and enhances the vocal soloists and chorus. At the end, Chailly holds a moment of ecstatic silence before the well-behaved Leipzig audience begins its thunderous applause. Of the performances of this symphony available on DVD in fine modern sound, the most serious competition comes from Claudio Abbado, whose Lucerne

Festival performance I've praised on a number of occasions in *IRR*. This Leipzig performance is on a comparable level in terms of its emotional force, the superlative orchestral playing and Chailly's inspired conducting. The camerawork is very fine and, as I've already suggested, the sound is extraordinarily good. It may seem an extravagance to suggest acquiring this DVD as well as Abbado's, but both performances are so good that I wouldn't want to choose between them.

I was bowled over by the television relay of this Eighth Symphony back in May 2011, and experiencing it again confirms that extremely positive impression. The opening of the first movement is far more purposeful – less ceremonial – than on Chailly's Decca studio recording, and it has a far stronger sense of propulsion and musical direction as a result. The first choral entry has a resonance and body of tone (as well as sheer volume) that launches things in the most impressive way, and the soloists all start well. As with the Second Symphony, the playing of the Gewandhaus Orchestra is one of the glories of this DVD.

It's fascinating to compare Chailly's comparatively static approach on his Amsterdam recording from 2000 with this vastly more exciting live performance, which is startlingly accurate as well. Chailly's audio recording was more convincing in the immense second movement, but again there's a greater sense of freedom, of risk-taking, of sheer abandon – as well as an engrossing attention to the subtleties of Mahler's orchestral writing – that puts the new performance in a very special class.

Of the soloists, Stephen Gould is the robust tenor: his may not always be the loveliest sound but he's very effective, particularly in 'Blick auf', where his voice becomes warmer. Dietrich Henschel is the eloquent baritone and Georg Zeppenfeld is thrillingly dramatic in his cleanly focused bass solos. Of the female soloists, the two mezzos Gerhild Romberger and Lioba Braun sing with poise and nobility. Soprano Erika Sunnegårdh is bright, clear – and touching at her quiet statements of 'zieht uns hinan', while Ricarda Merbeth has a vibrant, expressive sense of lyrical line. Oelze is a radiant Mater gloriosa. The choirs are pretty much beyond praise: they are immensely responsive and assured, and stupendous at the close.

As with the Second Symphony, sound and vision are of the highest quality. There's an exultant musical flow to this Leipzig performance of the Eighth Symphony that leads me to say that this is not only the best-played live performance of the work on DVD but that it's among the most musically satisfying ever recorded. It's also in vastly better sound than any of its serious rivals, including Tennstedt's filmed performance.

These are two exceptional Mahler performances. Chailly's consuming joy in making music – and particularly performing

Mahler – shines through these moving concerts. I recommend both these DVDs very highly indeed, but if I had to choose only one of them, it would have to be the Eighth Symphony – by a whisker. Chailly's 'Resurrection' moves me greatly and it has enormous stature, but live accounts of the Eighth as inspired and as superbly performed as this are truly rare occasions: this one is an engulfing, enthralling experience.

Nigel Simeone

## Mahler

Reissue

Symphony No. 6 in A minor.

**SWR Sinfonieorchester Baden-Baden und Freiburg/Kirill Kondrashin.**

**Hänssler Classic Historic CD94.217** (medium

price, 1 hour 8 minutes). Website [www.haenssler-classic.de](http://www.haenssler-classic.de). Engineer Anton Enders. Remastering Engineers Helmut Hanusch, Ute Hesse. Dates Live performances at the Hans Rosbaud Studio, Baden-Baden on January 13th-15th, 1981.

### Comparisons:

BPO/Barbirolli (Testament) SBT1342

(1966, rev. Apr 2004)

New Philharmonia Orch/Barbirolli

(Testament) SBT1451 (1967, rev. Sep 2009)

VPO/Boulez (DG) 445 835-2 (1994)

SWR SO Baden-Baden und Freiburg/Gielen

(Hänssler Classic) CD93.029 (1999, two discs)

Leningrad PO/Kondrashin

(Melodiya) MELCD1000811 (1978)

Kirill Kondrashin is nowadays probably best known for his series of Shostakovich symphonies with the Moscow Philharmonic (he premiered the Fourth and Thirteenth symphonies). On record he also ranks as a legendary concerto accompanist, having created not a few celebrated recordings in collaboration with the likes of Van Cliburn, Argerich and Richter. As the recent re-release of his Melodiya collection reminds us, he was also a superb Mahlerian, with particularly fine readings of the Fourth, Fifth and Ninth symphonies. Besides the extraordinary range of colours of his orchestras (perhaps even more apparent now when the various fashions of the day have all passed into history) it is the directness of his interpretative approach which is his most striking and commendable characteristic on record and this is certainly true of the finest of his Mahler recordings.

For sheer speed Kondrashin can have few rivals in the catalogue: this recording takes a mere 68-and-a-half minutes while his Leningrad Philharmonic recording took fewer than 66. For comparison, Gielen with this same orchestra in 1999 took just under 85 minutes – with 25 for the first movement (observing the repeat, of course, which Kondrashin omits), as opposed to Kondrashin's 17. Boulez took 79; even Barbirolli took around 75 in his live performances. Even the most fervent admirer of Kondrashin would have to admit that these durations do not speak well for his chances of getting to the heart of the work. The

brisk pace of the opening march is far less menacing than the measured tread of most other recordings: Mahler had good reason for his *ma non troppo* warning. Strangely enough, Kondrashin does hold back the tempo for the 'Alma' theme (we have only her word for that designation) – Barbirolli's performance in Berlin, available on Testament, shows the benefits of letting that theme surge on, as Mahler's *a Tempo subito – Schwungvoll* direction indeed implies. The movement's final fermata is nicely taken, just briefly held before slipping through the fingers, preventing the ending sounding quite too affirmative. There are plenty of exhilarating moments but listeners expecting this music to send a chill up the spine will be a little disappointed.

The Scherzo is in second place and its main tempo is blisteringly fast – again, Mahler's *Wuchtig* (weighty) seems not to have been given quite enough consideration. Maybe as a result, the effect of the contrasting tempos is no greater here than in many recordings where the contrast in numerical terms is not so great. The players struggle a little to keep up – understandably so. In the *Andante moderato* the emphasis is firmly on the *moderato*. There is a slightly gruff opening from the violins, rather lacking in mystery and sounding as though they might have been caught a little by surprise. In any case most listeners will probably prefer a little more eloquence through the movement's changes of mood and key.

There is much to be said for many of Kondrashin's interpretative points in the finale. The quick woodwind upbeats in the introduction are an evocative flurry rather than the measured arpeggio one hears too often; the bass line in the pages preceding the *Allegro energico* proper is given its due prominence, vital to clarifying the arrival into the home key for the main theme. Unfortunately, his approach is elsewhere not interventionist enough to realize the movement's shape and the 25 minutes it takes here feel rather longer than the 30-35 minutes it has taken in other hands.

Kondrashin's Leningrad Philharmonic recording dates from just three years earlier. Although the masters are rather worn, the Melodiya recording has the edge in clarity and range; the SWR recording is a little muddy by comparison. The SWR orchestra has the edge in technical ease but the Leningrad Philharmonic wins out for colour. Still, the impression from the Melodiya box remains: as great as this conductor is elsewhere, he does not seem ideally matched to this work.

Carl Rosman

**D** This symbol in a review heading indicates that the company provides a download service, directly or via a third party, but not necessarily for the release under review.

## Martinů Complete Symphonies.

New

Symphonies – No. 1, H289<sup>a</sup>; No. 2, S295<sup>b</sup>; No. 3, H299<sup>c</sup>; No. 4, H305<sup>d</sup>; No. 5, H310<sup>e</sup>; No. 6, H343, 'Fantaisies symphoniques'<sup>f</sup>.

**BBC Symphony Orchestra/Jiří Bělohlávek.**

**Onyx Classics ONYX4061** (medium price, three discs, 3 hours 3 minutes). Website [www.onyxclassics.com](http://www.onyxclassics.com) **D** Producer Ann McKay. Engineers <sup>a</sup>Neil Pemberton, <sup>b</sup>c<sup>e</sup>Susan Thomas, <sup>d</sup>Philip Burwell. Dates

Live performances at the Barbican Hall, London on October <sup>a</sup>3rd and <sup>b</sup>9th, 2009, <sup>d</sup>February 19th, <sup>e</sup>March 19th, <sup>c</sup>April 17th and <sup>f</sup>May 8th, 2010.

### Comparisons:

*Symphonies Nos. 1-6:*

Czech PO/Neumann (Supraphon) 11 0382-2

(1977, three discs)

*Symphony No. 1:*

Czech PO/Bělohlávek (Chandos) CHAN8950 (1990)

*Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4:*

Czech PO/Bělohlávek (Supraphon) SU3631-2 (2002)

*Symphony No. 4:*

Czech PO/Bělohlávek (Chandos) CHAN9138 (1992)

*Symphonies Nos. 5 and 6:*

Czech PO/Bělohlávek (Supraphon) SU4007-2

(2007, 2009, rev. Mar 2010)

*Symphony No. 6:*

Czech PO/Bělohlávek (Chandos) CHAN8897 (1990)

Although the Martinů symphonies went unrecorded as a cycle until the late 1970s, their representation on disc has since been extensive – with at least four such cycles along with numerous recordings of individual works. It might seem surprising that Jiří Bělohlávek's career-long advocacy has not previously resulted in a complete traversal, though this is, in fact, his third such attempt. The first, with the Czech Philharmonic for Chandos, resulted in only the First, Fourth and Sixth Symphonies; while the second, also with the Czech PO but this time for Supraphon, now lacks only the First and Second Symphonies and ought yet to see completion.

The present cycle stems from concerts that took place in the BBC Symphony's 2009-10 season, given in the sequence Nos. 1, 2, 5, 4, 3 and 6 and as part of often bizarrely inappropriate programmes. The recalcitrant Barbican acoustic has been made to yield an unexpected depth and perspective (more so, indeed, than on most recent LSO Live releases), with the succinctly informative note by Michael Crump a reminder that the analyses in his book *Martinů and the Symphony* (Toccata Press; 2011) confirm the importance of these works both on their own terms and as an approach to symphonic composition whose implications have only latterly been appreciated.

Here the First Symphony (1942) emerges as more than the well-made yet relatively cautious take on the neo-classical archetype it can appear. The first movement's oblique yet lucid sonata form is skilfully rendered (listen to how Bělohlávek 'collapses' the reprise into the coda at 8'12") and the Scherzo's blithe syncopation is well contrasted with the brittle