EMI CLASSICS

SIR SIMON RATTLE

Gustav Mahler

Gustav Mahler · Sir Simon Rattle

Compact Disc 1 **65.04**

Symphony No.1 in D Ⓟ 1992

1	Blumine	7.29
2	I. Langsam. Schleppend – Im Anfang sehr gemächlich	16.23
3	II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell	8.13
4	III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen	11.28
5	IV. Stürmisch bewegt	21.31

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 16–19.XII.1991, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements & Stephen Frost
Assistant engineers: Mike Hatch & Andy Beer

Compact Disc 2 **74.12**

Symphony No.3 in D minor Ⓟ 1998

1	I. Kräftig. Entschieden	33.35
2	II. Tempo di Menuetto. Sehr mäßig	10.22
3	III. Comodo. Scherzando. Ohne Hast	16.48
4	IV. Sehr langsam. Misterioso. Durchaus ppp *Nietzsche*	9.19
5	V. Lustig im Tempo und keck im Ausdruck *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*	4.06

Compact Disc 3 **57.16**

1	VI. Langsam. Ruhevoll. Empfunden	22.30

Birgit Remmert *contralto*
Ladies of the City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus
City of Birmingham Youth Chorus
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 5–7.X.1997, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Producer: David R. Murray · Assistant producer: Mark Howells
Balance engineer: Mike Clements · Editor: Stephen Frost

8 Lieder aus Des Knaben Wunderhorn Ⓟ 1998

2	Der Schildwache Nachtlied	5.51
3	Verlor'ne Müh'	2.31
4	Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?	1.58
5	Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen	6.58
6	Revelge	6.30
7	Der Tambourg'sell	5.27
8	Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt	3.47
9	Ablösung im Sommer	1.43

Simon Keenlyside *baritone*
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 16–17.IX.1997, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements · Editor: Stephen Frost

Compact Disc 4 **59.20**

Symphony No.4 in G Ⓟ 1998

1	I. Bedachtig, nicht eilen – Recht gemächlich	17.05
2	II. In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast	10.11
3	III. Ruhevoll	22.42
4	IV. Sehr behaglich	9.22

Amanda Roocroft *soprano*
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 8–9.V.1997, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements
Editors: Stephen Frost & Harriet Sims

Compact Disc 5 **68.59**

Symphony No.5 in C sharp minor ℗ 2002

1	I. Trauermarsch (In gemessenen Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt)	13.04
2	II. Stürmisch bewegt. Mit großer Vehemenz	14.24
3	III. Scherzo (Kräftig, nicht zu schnell)	16.56
4	IV. Adagietto. Sehr langsam	9.33
5	V. Rondo – Finale (Allegro)	15.02

Berliner Philharmoniker

Recorded: 7–10.IX.2002, Philharmonie, Berlin
Producer: Stephen Johns · Balance engineers: Mike Clements, Graham Kirkby & Andy Beer
Technical engineers: Graham Kirkby & Andy Beer
Editors: Simon Kiln, Jørn Pedersen & Caroline Haigh

Compact Disc 6 **77.12**

Symphony No.7 in E minor ℗ 1992

1	I. Adagio – Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo	22.06
2	II. Nachtmusik: Allegro moderato	14.40
3	III. Scherzo: Schattenhaft	10.15
4	IV. Nachtmusik: Andante amoroso	12.19
5	V. Rondo-Finale	17.51

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded live at the 1991 Aldeburgh Festival, 21–22.VI.1991, The Maltings Concert Hall, Snape, Suffolk
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements
Assistant engineers: Mike Hatch & Chris Ludwinski · Technical engineer: Andy Beer
Editor: Stephen Frost

Compact Disc 7 **77.36**

Symphony No.8 in E flat ℗ 2005

Part 1: Veni, creator spiritus *Hrabanus Maurus*

1	Veni, creator spiritus	1.26
2	Imple superna gratia	3.41

3	Infirma nostri corporis	2.47
4	Tempo I (Allegro, etwas hastig)	1.26
5	Infirma nostri corporis	3.09
6	Accende lumen sensibus	5.28
7	Qui Paraclitus diceris	3.25
8	Gloria Patri Domino	2.20

Part 2: Final Scene from *Faust* *Goethe*

9	Poco adagio	6.42
10	Più mosso (Allegro moderato)	3.03
11	Waldung, sie schwankt heran *Chor und Echo*	4.46
12	Ewiger Wonnebrand *Pater Ecstaticus*	1.27
13	Wie Felsenabgrund mir zu Füßen *Pater Profundus*	4.10
14	Gerettet ist das edle Glied *Engel*	2.35
15	Uns bleibt ein Erdenrest *Engel*	2.23
16	Ich spür' soeben *Die jüngeren Engel*	1.02
17	Höchste Herrscherin der Welt *Doctor Marianus*	3.50
18	Dir, der Unberührbaren *Chor*	3.03
19	Bei der Liebe, die den Füsen *Magna Peccatrix*	4.35
20	Neige, neige, du Ohnegleiche *Una poenitentum (Gretchen)*	1.38
21	Er überwächst uns schon *Chor seliger Knaben*	2.28
22	Komm! Hebe dich zu höhern Sphären! *Mater Gloriosa und Chor*	1.08
23	Blicket auf zum Retterblick *Doctor Marianus und Chor*	4.32
24	Alles Vergängliche *Chorus mysticus*	4.21
25		2.08

Christine Brewer *soprano* Magna Peccatrix
Soile Isokoski *soprano* Una Poenitentium (Gretchen)
Juliane Banse *soprano* Mater Gloriosa
Birgit Remmert *contralto* Mulier Samaritana
Jane Henschel *contralto* Maria Aegyptiaca
Jon Villars *tenor* Doctor Marianus
David Wilson-Johnson *baritone* Pater Ecstaticus
John Relyea *bass* Pater Profundus

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra Chorus
City of Birmingham Youth Chorus
London Symphony Chorus
Toronto Children's Choir
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded live: 5, 8–9.VI.2004, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Producer: Stephen Johns · Balance engineer: Mike Clements
Technical engineers: Graham Kirkby & Andy Beer
Editors: Simon Kiln & Jørn Pedersen · Production assistant: Kerry Brown

	Compact Disc 8	**77.23**
	Symphony No.10 *performing version by Deryck Cooke* Ⓟ 2000	
1	I. Adagio	25.10
2	II. Scherzo	11.24
3	III. 'Purgatorio' (Allegretto moderato)	3.55
4	IV. (Scherzo)	12.06
5	V. Finale	24.47

Berliner Philharmoniker

Recorded live, 24–25.IX.1999, Philharmonie, Berlin
Producer: Stephen Johns · Balance engineer: Mike Clements
Assistant engineers: Graham Kirkby & Andy Beer

	Compact Disc 9	**55.51**
	Symphony No.6 in A minor Ⓟ 1990	
1	I. Allegro energico, ma non troppo	25.35
2	II. Andante	16.53
3	III. Scherzo (Wuchtig)	13.21

	Compact Disc 10	**76.14**
1	IV. Finale: Allegro moderato	30.34

City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 14–16.XII.1989, Watford Town Hall
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements
Editors: Tony Harrison & Stephen Frost

	Symphony No.2 in C minor 'Resurrection' Ⓟ 1987	
2	I. Allegro maestoso	23.54
3	II. Andante moderato	10.13
4	III. In ruhig fließender Bewegung	11.27

	Compact Disc 11	**68.22**
1	IV. Urlicht (sehr feierlich, aber schlicht) *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*	5.12
2	V. Im Tempo des Scherzos (Wild herausfahrend) –	6.48
3	Wieder sehr breit	3.07
4	Ritardando... Maestoso	4.36
5	Wieder zurückhaltend	5.58
6	Langsam. Misterioso *Klopstock/Mahler*	6.34
7	Etwas bewegter	3.23
8	Mit Aufschwung, aber nicht eilen	4.43

Arleen Augér *soprano* · **Janet Baker** *mezzo-soprano*
City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Orchestra

Recorded: 27 April, 30.V & 1.VI.1986, Watford Town Hall
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Michael Sheady

	Symphony No.9 in D Ⓟ 1993	
9	I. Andante comodo	27.47

Compact Disc 12 **53.17**

1	II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers. Etwas täppisch und sehr derb	15.38
2	III. Rondo-Burleske (Allegro assai. Sehr trotzig)	12.50
3	IV. Adagio (Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend)	24.48

Wiener Philharmoniker

Recorded live, 4–5.XII.1993, Großer Saal, Musikverein, Vienna
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineers: Harald Steger & Anton Reininger, ORF, Wien
Editors: Jørn Pedersen, Paul Baily & Simon Kiln

Compact Disc 13 **68.47**
Das klagende Lied (original version) ℗ 1985

1	I. Waldmärchen	28.38
2	II. Der Spielmann	17.38
3	III. Hochzeitsstück	18.57

Helena Döse *soprano* · **Alfreda Hodgson** *mezzo-soprano*
Robert Tear *tenor* · **Sean Rea** *baritone*
City of Birmingham Symphony Chorus and Orchestra

Recorded: 12–13.X. & 24.VI.1984, Birmingham Town Hall
Producer: John Willan. Balance engineer: Michael Sheady

Das Lied von der Erde ℗ 1996

4	VI. Der Abschied *extract*	3.27

Anne-Sofie von Otter *mezzo-soprano*
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 9–15.VII.& 8–12.VIII.1995, Symphony Hall, Birmingham
Executive producer: David R. Murray · Producer & editor: Stephen Frost
Balance engineer: Mike Clements

Compact Disc 14 **63.30**
Das Lied von der Erde ℗ 1997
from 'The Chinese Flute' by Hans Bethge

1	I. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde *after Li-Tai Po*	8.29
2	II. Der Einsame im Herbst *after Chiang-Tsi*	9.43
3	III. Von der Jugend *after Li-Tai Po*	3.14
4	IV. Von der Schönheit *after Li-Tai Po*	7.02
5	V. Der Trunkene im Frühling *after Li-Tai Po*	4.33
6	VI. Der Abschied *after Mong-Kao Jen and Wan-Sei*	30.29

Peter Seiffert *tenor* · **Thomas Hampson** *baritone*
City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra

Recorded: 28–30.XII.1995, Butterworth Hall, Arts Centre, University of Warwick
Producer: David R. Murray · Balance engineer: Mike Clements · Editor: Stephen Frost

Design: Hugo Wheatley for WLP Ltd.
Editorial: Peter Quantrill for WLP Ltd.
Photography: Peter Adamik

Mahler: Complete Symphonies, etc.

'The child is father of the man,' wrote William Wordsworth. It's striking how often the childhood works of the great composers bear this out. The young Dmitri Shostakovich's first attempt at composition was a *Funeral March for the Victims of the Revolution*. At the age of eleven Anton Bruckner made his first setting of St Thomas Aquinas's hymn 'Pange lingua'. The great English pastoralist Ralph Vaughan Williams penned a tiny piano piece called *The Robin's Nest* before he was ten, while Benjamin Britten was exploring the theme of boyhood in music before he was old enough to know the meaning of the word nostalgia.

In later life Gustav Mahler told his friend and confidante Natalie Bauer-Lechner that as he child he had composed 'a polka, to which he had added a funeral march as an introduction'. So it would seem that Mahler's love of throwing together extremes, the desire he later expressed to Sibelius to 'embrace everything' in his symphonic works, goes right back to his earliest, most formative years. There may have been cultural forces at work here: Jewish popular music is rich in irony and play of emotional extremes – dancing tragedy, 'laughter through tears' as Shostakovich memorably put it; while the folk music of Mahler's native Bohemia includes the Dumka, a form which opposes melancholic song and exuberant dance without any attempt at mediation.

Judging from accounts of Mahler's childhood it appears that even as a very young boy he was acutely aware of the contradictions and incongruities – sometimes comic, sometimes painful – that fill even the most ordinary lives. Mahler's unique achievement was to fuse these elements into magnificent symphonic statements: unified enough to grip as musical 'narratives', without smoothing over the cracks, softening the mood-swings, or rationalising the paradoxes. The parallels with another great Czech-born Jewish artist, Franz Kafka, are intriguing. Yet they are only parallels: throughout his career Mahler followed his own imperatives, and in the process created one of the most distinctive, instantly recognizable sound-worlds in the orchestral repertory.

It is fascinating to find so much of that sound-world already in place in the choral-orchestral cantata *Das klagende Lied* ('The Song of Sorrow', 1880), the work in which Mahler later claimed he found himself as 'Mahler' – he was only 20, and newly graduated from the Vienna Conservatoire. The vivid, mystically inflected evocations of nature, the nervous intensity and combination of intense pathos with macabre mockery, the grim sombre march: all will be instantly recognisable to those who know the symphonies. Equally Mahlerian is the use of sharply distinct instrumental colours, in contrast to the richly blended orchestral gravy of Brahms.

Still there are times when the voice falters in *Das klagende Lied*. This is emphatically not the case with the First Symphony (1884–8, rev. 1893, 1896 and 1898), even in its first version. Originally the symphony came with a title, 'Titan', linking it directly to the novel of the same name by the romantic writer Johann Paul Richter ('Jean Paul'). Mahler was right to drop it: the symphony's 'story' is entirely his own. It begins with a fabulous evocation of nature awaking at dawn, then an extended quotation from the second of Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* ('Songs of a Wayfarer') suggests that the beginning of the main Allegro is also the beginning of a journey. Rustic dance music is celebrated then viewed sarcastically in the following scherzo and trio. Then begins one of Mahler's weirdest funeral marches, based on the old French song 'Frère Jacques', at its heart wild echoes of Klezmer music and another long quotation from *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* – in which the cycle's hero contemplates death. The finale then strives from 'Inferno to Paradise', as Mahler initially described it, culminating in a massive major-key hymn with echoes of 'And he shall reign' from Handel's *Messiah*.

The darkness/suffering to light/affirmation journey intensifies and expands in the Second Symphony ('Resurrection', 1888–94), which begins with Mahler's grimmest funeral march to date, and culminates in a monumental choral setting of Friedrich Klopstock's avowedly Christian 'Resurrection Ode'. But whatever Mahler's thoughts on the Christian – or Jewish – Deity, he was too steeped in the ideas of the atheists Schopenhauer and Nietzsche to accept orthodox dogma without demur. 'Resurrection' here may be better interpreted in a humanist sense, as in Ibsen's slightly later *When We Dead Awaken*. But the contrast of simple faith, touchingly depicted in the 'Urlicht' movement, with the sarcasm and desperation of the preceding Scherzo suggests a split in Mahler himself – a split which, with typical honesty, he depicts here without any attempt at comforting reconciliation.

When Mahler began his Third Symphony (1895–6) he contemplated borrowing a title from one of Nietzsche's works, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* ('The Joyful Science') to illustrate a symphonic celebration of nature in all its glorious and terrible truth and before ascending to the spiritual plane. But Mahler could not

follow Nietzsche in his rejection of compassion, and summed up the symphony's finale's message in verse: 'Father, see these wounds of mine! Let no creature of yours be lost!' [*Vater, sieh an die Wunden mein! Kein Wesen laß verloren sein!*] In any case he was beginning to lose faith in titles and programmes. Mahler never saw himself as an 'absolute musician' – a phrase sometimes applied (perhaps misleadingly) to his contemporary Sibelius. He wanted his audiences to search for meanings in his music, but he had also come to realise that you could tell them too much.

Mahler originally considered incorporating one of his settings from the classic German folk collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* ('The Boy's Magic Horn') in the Third Symphony. Then he was struck by a highly original idea: why not make the song, *Das himmliche Leben* ('Heavenly Life'), the finale of his next symphony, No.4 (1899–1900), so that the entire work develops organically towards it? The symphony was initially conceived in a spirit of playfulness (he referred to it as a 'Humoresque'): a colour-enhanced 'neo-Classical' orchestra with affectionate-mischievous touches of mock rococo in the first movement, evoking the moods of childhood and culminating in a child's vision of heaven. But Mahler was too sophisticated to subscribe to adult sentimental notions of childish 'innocence'. Darker elements also intrude: the pre-echo of the Fifth Symphony's Funeral March in the first movement; the portrayed of Death as a beguiling folk fiddler in the second; the elegiac quality behind the 'restful' slow movement theme; or the references to Herod and the taking of innocent lives in the finale.

After the Fourth, Mahler never again included songs directly in his symphonies. But echoes of 'Der Tambourg'sell' – the 'drummer-lad' condemned to death for desertion – from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* haunt the opening Funeral March of Symphony No.5 (1901–2), while motifs from a different *Wunderhorn* song, the satirical *Lob des hohen Verstands* ('In Praise of Lofty Intellect') launch the finale's muscular counterpoint – Mahler here takes a swipe at those critics who had dismissed his contrapuntal skills. One of Mahler's most extreme lurches of mood comes between the bleak ending of the second movement and the almost manic exhilaration of the following Scherzo. But the Scherzo's opening horn flourish is based on the same outline as the motif that concludes the previous movement – there's enough of an organic link here to persuade the ear to keep listening. The famous Adagietto is in effect a 'song without words', an outpouring of love for Alma Schindler, who

was to become Mahler's wife in 1902. It stands as a bridge between the emotionally riven world of the first three movements and the vigorous affirmation of the finale.

At its second performance in Vienna, the Sixth Symphony (1903–5, rev. 1908) came with a title: 'Tragic' – though this too was dropped. It is certainly Mahler's darkest symphony, its grim A minor conclusion intensifying and enriching the strikingly similar ending of *Das klagende Lied*. For some listeners the Sixth is a terrifying, even nihilistic experience. For others though there is something exhilarating about it, while Mahler's biographer Michael Kennedy is not alone in finding it 'tragedy on a high plane, classical in conception and execution'. Mahler was almost certainly influenced by Nietzsche's view of tragedy. For Nietzsche, ancient Greek tragic drama represented something uniquely sane, 'healthy'. Through it spectators could contemplate life in its cruellest and most painful aspects and be enabled to come to terms with it – or as Nietzsche put it, say 'Yes' to life. If so it is ironic that life was soon to deal blows to Mahler – especially the death of his daughter and diagnosis of his own heart condition – that necessitated a radical revision of this philosophy. Some listeners, including Alma Mahler, have heard anticipations of those 'hammer blows' of fate in the Sixth Symphony's epic finale.

For many years the Seventh Symphony (1904–5) was the 'Cinderella' of the cycle. Certainly it is one of the hardest to grasp on first hearing. The first two movements look back to No.6 – but at a distance. The finale however anticipates the massive collective rejoicing of the Eighth's first movement. Between them come Mahler's weirdest, most demonic Scherzo and the teasing, subtly perfumed second 'Nachtmusik' ('Night Music') – apparently 'amoroso', yet not without its sinister touches. If the Fifth Symphony manages to sustain a sense of continuity in wild diversity, the continuity of No.7 is harder to find – and it isn't necessarily reinforced by the return of earlier themes towards the end of the finale. Yet the Seventh is also endlessly fascinating, and Mahler's orchestral imagination is dazzling throughout – this is perhaps the closest he came to a 'concerto for orchestra'.

Mahler regarded the Eighth Symphony (1906–7) as his greatest. Not everyone has agreed with him, but in the right performance, this vast, oceanic, stupendously colourful symphony can be an overwhelming experience, with its final hymn to Goethe's concept of the 'Ewig-Weibliche' ('Eternal Feminine') arising on a great tide of choral-orchestral sound which

seems to have been prepared by the symphony's very opening bars. Mahler's own interpretation of the 'Ewig-Weibliche' in his letters underlines the notion of Eros as the driving force of the (male) creative mind, while the nature of his comments to Alma make it clear that it is she who has been the Muse's principal incarnation for him. It is especially ironic then that as the Eighth had its triumphant premiere in Munich in 1910 (the greatest triumph of Mahler's career), he was coming close to losing her – she had already been strongly attracted to a handsome young architect named Walter Gropius, and would soon be having an affair with him.

Mahler called *Das Lied von der Erde* ('The Song of the Earth', 1907–9) a 'song-symphony'. It can therefore be seen to stand midway between the symphonies and the song cycles. But a spiritual fault-line separates *Das Lied von der Erde* from the Eighth Symphony and places it much closer to Symphonies 9 and 10. Mahler began *Das Lied* after the diagnosis of a lesion on his heart and strict instructions from his doctor to begin a new, less demanding regime. The word 'heart' turns up – often with poignantly personal associations – again and again in the poetry, translated and adapted from ancient Chinese sources. The sense of horror at life in the first song, and the recurring sense of loss is more acutely personal here than in the Sixth Symphony. Note too how the triumphant rising 'Ewig' from the end of the Eighth Symphony becomes a resigned 'dying fall' at the end of *Das Lied*.

But had Mahler resigned himself to the inevitable? The evidence of the last two symphonies points in conflicting directions. True, the Ninth (1909) takes the 'Ewig' dying fall and develops it into an unmistakable 'Leb-e-wohl' ('Fare-ye-well') motif in the finale – thus echoing the use of the same motif in Beethoven's Piano Sonata 'Les Adieux' ('The Farewells'), which Mahler had played to great effect in his teens. The depiction of dying breaths on the symphony's closing page is as painfully moving as – and still more realistic than – the dying heartbeat ending of Tchaikovsky's 'Pathétique' Symphony. But a quotation in that closing page from Mahler's song cycle *Kindertotenlieder* ('Songs on the Death of Children') – with its strong connections to the memory of his much-mourned brother Ernst and daughter Maria ('Putzi') – may lead one to ask *whose* death is being portrayed here.

Then – incredibly – the Tenth Symphony (1910) appears to take off from where the Ninth ended and move into completely new territory. Mahler had finished the Tenth Symphony in sketch score and partly orchestrated the first three movements at the time of his death. For a long time the second, fourth and fifth movements were thought to be unperformable, but the English Mahler scholar Deryck Cooke showed that without too much speculative fleshing-out the symphony can be performed in its entirety. What Cooke's 'Performing Version' shows, at the very least, is that the Tenth was well on its way to being one of Mahler's greatest utterances. Its journey takes us through even more terrifying (and startlingly 'modernist') territory than No.9, but its ending provides consolation beyond that offered in any of the previous symphonies – every bit as heart-easing as the exquisite, falling conclusion of *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Mahler: Sämtliche Sinfonien u.a.

„Das Kind ist des Mannes Vater", schrieb William Wordsworth. Es ist schon verblüffend, wie viele Kindheitswerke großer Komponisten das bestätigen. Der erste Kompositionsversuch des jungen Dmitri Schostakowitsch war ein *Trauermarsch für die Opfer der Revolution*. Mit elf Jahren vertonte Anton Bruckner zum ersten Male den Hymnus *Pange lingua* des Heiligen Thomas von Aquin. Der große englische „Pastoralist" Ralph Vaughan Williams schrieb noch, bevor er zehn Jahre alt wurde, ein winziges Klavierstück namens *The Robin's Nest* nieder, und Benjamin Britten setzte sich musikalisch bereits mit dem Thema Kindheit auseinander, als er noch nicht alt genug war, um zu wissen, was Nostalgie bedeutet.

In späteren Jahren verriet Gustav Mahler seiner alten Freundin und Vertrauten Natalie Bauer-Lechner, als Kind eine Polka komponiert und zu dieser einen Trauermarsch als Einleitung verfasst zu haben. Mahlers besondere Neigung, Extreme zusammenzubringen, der Wunsch, in seinen sinfonischen Werken „alles zu umfassen", wie er Sibelius gegenüber später erklärte – sie mögen direkt auf seine frühesten, prägendsten Jahre zurückgehen. Hier können kulturelle Kräfte gewirkt haben: Die jüdische Volksmusik ist reich an Ironie und dem Spiel mit emotionalen Extremen, eine tanzende Tragödie oder „Lachen unter Tränen", wie es Schostakowitsch so bemerkenswert formulierte; andererseits gehörte zur Folklore in Mahlers böhmischer Heimat die Dumka, eine Form, in der melancholischer Gesang und überschwenglicher Tanz ohne jeden Vermittlungsversuch nebeneinander stehen.

Den Berichten über Mahlers Kindheit zufolge war sich anscheinend schon der kleine Knabe