

# GUSTAV MAHLER: CONDUCTING MULTICULTURALISM

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*Musicologists and historians have generally paid much more attention to Gustav Mahler's famous career as a composer than to his work as a conductor. His choices in concert repertoire and style, however, reveal much about his personal experiences in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and his interactions with contemporary cultural and political upheavals. This project examines Mahler's conducting career in the multicultural climate of late nineteenth-century Vienna and New York. It investigates the degree to which these contexts influenced the conductor's repertoire and questions whether Mahler can be viewed as an early proponent of multiculturalism.*

There is a wealth of scholarship on Gustav Mahler's diverse compositional activity, but his conducting repertoire and the multicultural contexts that influenced it, has not received the same critical attention.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I examine Mahler's connection to the crumbling, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century depiction of the Austro-Hungarian Empire as united and question whether he can be regarded as an exemplar of early multiculturalism. I trace Mahler's career through Budapest, Vienna and New York, explore the degree to which his repertoire choices reflected the established opera canon of his time, or reflected contemporary cultural and political trends, and address uncertainties about Mahler's relationship to the various multicultural contexts in which he lived and worked. Ultimately, I argue that Mahler's varied experiences cannot be separated from his decisions regarding what kinds of music he believed his audiences would want to hear, as well as what kinds of music he felt were relevant or important to share. By taking into account the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic backgrounds of the cities Mahler worked in as well as his personal experiences crossing national borders, we can better understand the nature of Mahler's conducting career. Such an exploration provides an interesting opportunity to build bridges between histories of society and culture and the world of music.

Use of the term multiculturalism in the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century may appear anachronistic. In Vienna and New York, however, the question of how multiple cultures and nationalities could, or should, live side-by-side was unavoidable. Both the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the United States grappled with questions and concerns regarding citizenship and language. In *Multicultural Odysseys*, Will Kymlicka defines multiculturalism as a global and specifically liberal phenomenon, a political discourse that emphasizes a need to "accommodate" diversity.<sup>3</sup> This view of multiculturalism goes beyond the basic provision of

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<sup>2</sup> For instance: Jens Malte Fischer, *Gustav Mahler* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011); Constantin Flores, *Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies* (New Jersey: Amadeus Press, 2003); Stuart Feder, *Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010); Michael Kennedy, *Mahler* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Norman Lebrecht, *Why Mahler?: How One Man and Ten Symphonies Changed Our World* (New York: Pantheon, 2010); Jeremy Barham, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Henry-Louis de La Grange's four volume biography.

<sup>3</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 3.

rights to a more thorough “support for ethnocultural minorities to maintain and express their distinct identities and practices.”<sup>4</sup> He points to a need for scholarly research into the origins of multiculturalism prior to the mid-twentieth century in order to better understand multiculturalism in its current globalized state.<sup>5</sup> Although Kymlicka situates liberal multiculturalism on a grand, governmental scale as a relatively recent trend, his definition of the phenomenon is a useful lens through which to explore Mahler's conducting experiences in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Vienna and New York. In “Multiculturalism and Political Ontology,” Paul Patton explores the issues nations face in trying to institute a multicultural policy and how laws should be created to reflect the different cultures living within a nation's borders. Cultures, Patton argues, are not discrete entities but are syncretic, interwoven bodies of knowing, believing and acting. A given culture does not exist in a vacuum but is influenced by, and reflective of the surrounding cultures with which it comes into contact. Accordingly, nations or empires, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, need to be viewed as “conglomerates of differences.”<sup>6</sup>

Carl Niekerk views Mahler's compositions in a way paralleling Patton's view of multiculturalism. He argues that rather than endeavor to emulate the Austro-German culture of the empire in his music writing, Mahler adopted a complex view of this culture as diverse and far from monolithic.<sup>7</sup> Niekerk notes that although many of the empire's Jews regarded German culture as progressive and more tolerant and chose to associate themselves with it, Mahler did not follow suit. He did not fully assimilate into what could be conceived as traditional German culture but instead recognized its many-layered complexity and chose to demonstrate this in his music.<sup>8</sup> In pieces like his *Wunderhorn* songs, the compositions “identify with outsiders in society.”<sup>9</sup> Mahler dissected German culture, using Wagner, Goethe and Nietzsche (among others) as inspiration, and emphasized the heterogeneous nature of German history and its interaction with other cultures.<sup>10</sup> In doing so, Mahler noted a certain universality of characteristics among cultures and human experience and that certain ideas and emotions crossed the borders of geography and time.<sup>11</sup> Far from trying to assimilate into German culture, Mahler reinvented it, especially in his later works in Vienna and New York.<sup>12</sup> Mahler, according to Niekerk, was very much a product of his time and surroundings. He observed and critiqued the predominant Austro-German culture around him and contextualized and historicized it in his own works in order to fully recognize its diverse origins and the way other cultures influenced it.

Like Vienna, New York City enjoyed a vibrant immigrant culture from the late nineteenth into the early twentieth century. As the city underwent changes due to industry and immigration, city dwellers faced changes in their everyday lives and in the layout of the city itself.<sup>13</sup> Sabine Haenni argues that cultural and leisure activities were ways in which city dwellers coped with the changing environment. Immigrant groups did not passively receive commercial entertainments,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Patton, “Multiculturalism and Political Ontology,” in Duncan Ivison, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Multiculturalism* (Farnham, UK: The Ashgate Publishing Group, 2010), 61-63.

<sup>7</sup> Carl Niekerk, *Reading Mahler: German Culture and Jewish Identity in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 210-11.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 218-9.

<sup>13</sup> Sabine Haenni, *The Immigrant Scene: Ethnic Amusements in New York, 1880-1920* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 1, 3.

but rather interacted with and influenced these kinds of cultural products.<sup>14</sup> Haenni closely examines the impact of German immigrants and finds that they experienced a period of particular popularity in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> German culture, Haenni posits, became popular enough that it influenced American culture in New York City as a whole. This immigrant culture came to have a special place in the city's culture and received a kind of promotion (though not one put forth by the government itself) and accommodation that could be described as multicultural. Using Kymlicka's and Patton's conceptions of multiculturalism as a guide, it is possible to explore whether Mahler advocated the appreciation and promotion of different cultures. Similarly, with Niekerk and Haenni's insights and nuanced understandings of cultures living side-by-side as a diving off point, I wade deep into Mahler's repertoire in order to determine if he specifically chose to perform pieces that celebrated the multicultural contexts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and New York.

Mahler's attraction to ideas of multiculturalism was not only drawn from his exposure to different cultures in Bohemia, Slovenia, Hungary, Germany and Austria, but was also the product of personal experience and the complexities of his identity. Mahler was born to Jewish parents in 1860 and spent his childhood in the Bohemian city of Iglau. He described himself as "thrice homeless: as a Czech among Austrians, as an Austrian among Germans, and as a Jew throughout the world."<sup>16</sup> This sentiment is reflective of, among other things, the precarious foundation upon which Austro-Hungarian unity was built. Particularly in the latter half of the nineteenth century, cracks in the empire's multicultural framework became more visible. The empire was rocked by the growing nationalistic sentiments of the peoples living within it, the spread of revolution across Europe, and the rise of figures like Lajos Kossuth in Hungary, who called for greater autonomy for their peoples. In 1867, the empire found itself threatened and Emperor Franz Joseph decided it was time for compromise. The Emperor recognized Budapest and Hungary and the Austrian empire became the Austro-Hungarian Empire with dual capitals and dual monarchies. As the Austro-Hungarian Empire grappled with these changes, a strong sense of national or even personal identity could prove difficult to form.

Although Mahler was born in Bohemia, in many ways he was not culturally Bohemian. Having grown up in German-speaking Iglau, he considered himself culturally German. The Austro-Hungarian regime offered more opportunity for Jews to advance in government, military and medicine and Mahler felt it would further his career goals to choose an Austro-German identity.<sup>17</sup> For the most part, he identified himself with the German-speaking groups of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and while he did not denounce Judaism, he converted to Catholicism in 1897 in order to further his career.<sup>18</sup> While it is evident that Mahler actively constructed his identity to suit his interests, he also struggled with certain identities that were thrust upon him. Both his background and the music he performed associated him, in the minds of others, with certain images that were difficult to shed. He remarked, "I am always called a Bohemian...I read it everywhere yet I am not. I am a German...It is also true that I admire [the Czech composer] Smetana. Yet I admire also Debussy, and that does not make me a Frenchman."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 57-9.

<sup>16</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1910, part five, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Julian Johnson, *Mahler's voices: expression and irony in the songs and symphonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 252.

<sup>18</sup> Norman Lebrecht, *Mahler Remembered* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 54.

<sup>19</sup> *New York Daily Tribune*, April 30, 1910, part five, p. 2.

Mahler's musical education did not include traditional conductor training, but was influenced by his background, and by his travels in Bad Hall (1880), Ljubljana, Slovenia (1881), Olmütz, Moravia (1883), Kassel, Germany and Prague (1885-6) and Leipzig (1886-8).<sup>20</sup> While he did attend the Conservatoire in Vienna, the school did not offer conducting until much later, in 1909.<sup>21</sup> In many ways, as Herta Blaukopf has noted, Mahler “was simply thrown in at the deep end and left to sink or swim.”<sup>22</sup> His initial experiences were sometimes less than professional. In Olmütz, for example, the relationship between Mahler and the performers had a rocky start. As baritone singer Jacques Manheit recalled, at Mahler’s first rehearsal with the chorus, “He started the rehearsal without bothering to introduce himself to anybody. All his colleagues, men and women alike, regarded the new conductor with unconcealed hostility, which they expressed loudly and without reserve.”<sup>23</sup> This impression did not change immediately. Two days later, the bass singer, in a fit of frustration, exclaimed: “I can’t sing with this man. He holds his baton in his right hand, then in his left, and keeps on passing his free hand over his face, so that I can’t see any of his cues.”<sup>24</sup> Mahler explained to the infuriated singer that his free hand was busy catching the spectacles that kept sliding off of his sweaty face. He was intent on setting things right, however, and, as Manheit recounts, “he went to the wardrobe master for a broad piece of ribbon, fastened his prince-nez to it, and hooked it around his ears. But now he looked so comic that when the singers looked down on him from the stage they were convulsed with laughter.”<sup>25</sup> While amusing, this example also indicates Mahler’s willingness to learn and adapt to his circumstances – a characteristic which went beyond the idiosyncrasies of singers and spectacles and influenced his approaches to repertoire.

From 1888 to 1891 Mahler served as conductor of Budapest’s Royal Hungarian Opera. Although he later became renowned for his talent and discipline, this earlier part of his conducting career met with mixed response. In 1890, for example, the newspaper *Zenelap* questioned Mahler’s intentions, stating:

In the last year and a half not a single Hungarian opera has been performed in the Royal Hungarian Opera House. Is this a proper state of affairs? We think not...Herr Mahler, do not think the Hungarian public is so naïve as to be dazzled by a few words of greeting in Hungarian which you have learned by heart and trot out in front of the General Manager whenever the opportunity arises!<sup>26</sup>

Is *Zenelap*’s assessment of Mahler's conducting accurate? Did Mahler fail to represent the cultural diversity of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in which he worked for much of his life? The Opera House functioned as the heart of the music scene in Budapest. Accordingly, Mahler’s position was high profile and attracted both anti-Semitic and nationalistic press reports that felt

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<sup>20</sup> Herta Blaukopf, “Mahler as conductor in the opera house and concert hall,” in Jeremy Barham, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165-170.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Allan Peattie, *the Fin-de-siècle Metropolis, Memory, Modernity and the Music of Gustav Mahler*. Dissertation at Harvard University (ProQuest: Ann Arbor, MI, 2003), 105.

<sup>22</sup> Blaukopf, “Mahler as conductor,” 165.

<sup>23</sup> Manheit's recollections recorded by Ludwig Karpath, “Aus Gustav Mahler's Wanderjahren,” *Montags-Revue*, Vienna, 18 May 1908 in Kurt Blaukopf ed., *Mahler: A Documentary Study*, trans. Paul Baker (London: Thames & Hudson, 1976), 166.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 187.

he did not adequately appreciate and respect his Hungarian audience.<sup>27</sup> In Budapest, Mahler emphasized accessibility over other qualities in his repertoire. This may have been in response to the fact that the Budapest Opera House was quite new (opening in 1884) and that the city was starting to grow into its role as the second capital of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At this point, exposing audiences to opera, and making it comprehensible, could have been considered as a more appropriate goal than introducing novelties in programming. Although the *Zenelap* critique states otherwise, Mahler did include specifically Hungarian pieces in his repertoire, such as the anonymously written “Two Hungarian Folk Songs,” excerpts of Ödön Mihálovich’s opera *Toldi*, and Sandor Erkel’s *Festival Overture*, and Wagner’s *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps he did so in order to improve the opera tradition in Budapest rather than out of any commitment to celebrating multiculturalism; in any case, Mahler’s performance of operas in Hungarian does not address whether he took his multicultural experiences into account. For his first season in Budapest, Mahler focused on the administration of the opera and while his ensuing experiences there crystallized the question of how to represent diverse cultures, he did not fulfill the entirety of his ten year contract and, ultimately, did not stay in Budapest long enough for scholars to adequately evaluate whether or not his approach to repertoire was multicultural. Further study into Mahler’s actions in other locations and situations relates a more revealing story.

Despite dubious beginnings, Mahler became known for his incredibly high standards in music. He worked at making singers’ egos subservient to the music and the overall quality of the production. He was reputed for uncut performances of Wagner’s music dramas, the introduction of new works and young artists, and the fact that he did not allow patrons to arrive late.<sup>29</sup> Having already established himself as a skilled and internationally renowned conductor, the opera houses and philharmonics in Vienna and New York granted him greater control over artistic issues compared to earlier on in his career. This situates them as sites from which to glean Mahler’s personal approach to, and goals for repertoire. They show that he was aware of his surroundings and of contemporary political and social concerns. Mahler presented a diverse repertoire, including pieces from the classical cannon, contemporary compositions, and pieces by composers from varied national and ethnic backgrounds. The cultural influences he favoured and exhibited the most were Czech, but overall, his choices in repertoire reveal that he was indelibly shaped by his surroundings and made a conscious effort to represent myriad groups.

Mahler’s place within Vienna’s fin-de-siècle society and culture has attracted the attention of numerous scholars.<sup>30</sup> Musically, Mahler had more romantic and conservative taste than some of the *avant garde* movements that rose to prominence at this time.<sup>31</sup> He avoided some subjects, such as sexuality, that *avant garde* artists like Richard Strauss, Gustav Klimt and

<sup>27</sup> Knud Martner, *Mahler’s Concerts* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2010), 65, 73.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 71.

<sup>29</sup> Herta Blaukopf, “Mahler’s First Season as Director at the k.k. Hofopertheater: The Composer Waits in the Wings,” in Jeremy Barham, ed., *Perspectives on Gustav Mahler* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 327-343.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Niekerk; Knittel, Kay M, *Seeing Mahler: Music and the Language of Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (Farnham: Ashgate 2010); Gerald Stourzh, “An Apogee of Conversions: Gustav Mahler, Karl Kraus and ‘fin de siècle’ Vienna,” *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts*, 3 (2004), 49-70; Karen Painter, “The Sensuality of timbre: Responses to Mahler and Modernity at the fin de siècle,” *19<sup>th</sup> Century Music*, 18, 3 (1995), 236-257; Michael Steinberg, “The Musical fin-de-siècle and the Uses of Disenchantment,” *American Imago*, 68, 4 (2011), 651-664; Kirk Ditzler, “Traditionist ‘Schlamperer’: Gustav Mahler and the Vienna Court Opera,” *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 29, 1 (1998), 11-28; Edward F. Kravitt, “Mahler, Victim of the ‘New’ Anti-Semitism,” *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 127, 1 (2002), 72-94.

<sup>31</sup> Johnson, 228.

Oskar Kokoschka explored.<sup>32</sup> As Julian Johnson notes, “Even after his move to Vienna in 1897, Mahler's work exemplified aspects of the city's culture but at the same time remained distant from it.”<sup>33</sup> It can be said that, at least musically, Mahler represents the nostalgia that would later become associated with his era. While he considered himself a German Austrian, his music does present other parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in a favourable light. In addition to the Austro-German influence in his music, folk songs of Eastern European and Slavic origins are featured in his compositions. This characteristic worked well with the aims of twentieth century writers such as Joseph Roth and Stefan Zweig, or, more recently, Frank Wildhorn, István Deák and Steve Cuden.<sup>34</sup> These writers viewed the reign of the empire with nostalgia (though often coupled with bitterness) and painted a rosy picture of how different nationalities interacted within it. Far from being naïve, Mahler was acutely aware of the cultural battles that were a part of Viennese society and culture.

As mentioned above, the Austro-Hungarian Empire struggled with issues of nationalism during this period and intertwined with such concerns was the rise of mass politics. The Austrian liberal bourgeoisie gained greater political power in the latter part of the century but even as they benefited, they began to fear the loss of their power and fought to maintain it.<sup>35</sup> Gail Marshall notes that even as *fin de siècle* Vienna “acutely felt tremors of social and political disintegration,” it simultaneously “proved one of the most fertile breeding grounds for our [twentieth] century liberal culture.”<sup>36</sup> Alongside innovations in science, psychology, art and politics, were anxieties over what the twentieth century would bring.<sup>37</sup> For the embattled bourgeoisie, the next century seemed like it would bring degeneration and disaster.<sup>38</sup> Artists, thinkers and scientists sought to reflect this tempestuous period and to question traditional middle class values, suggesting that these might be the cause of decay and disorder. New connotations were associated with Charles Darwin's discoveries; namely, that evolution did not necessarily progress in a linear manner but could involve degeneration as well.<sup>39</sup> In terms of art, artists explored the inner world of mankind's anxieties, dreams and nightmares. While there is no overall unifying characteristic or style to art in this time period, there was an emphasis on moving away from the traditional Western art tradition. In visual art this sentiment often manifested in abstract representations of people and objects. In music, composers like Arnold Schoenberg began to turn away from traditional Western tonality.

Although Mahler's music did not fully reflect the spectrum of *fin de siècle* ideas, he was certainly aware of them and even participated in discussions regarding new approaches to art and society. He was an avid member of Vienna's Academic Wagner Society and supported Wagner's vision despite international controversy. Wagner advocated many ideas that split the musical community. In particular, he spoke about the “total work of art” or *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the use of

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 228-9.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>34</sup> Solomon Wank, “The Nationalities Question in the Habsburg Monarchy: Reflections on the Historical Record,” (Paper presented at the Center for Austrian Studies, University of Minnesota, April 1993), <http://www.cas.umn.edu/assets/pdf/WP933.PDF>.

<sup>35</sup> Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), xxvi.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., xviii.

<sup>37</sup> Gail Marshall ed., “Introduction,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>38</sup> Shearer West, *Fin de Siècle* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>39</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, “Psychology at the fin de Siècle,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Fin de Siècle*, ed. Gail Marshall (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 15.

chromaticism in composition, and the reinterpretation of canon works through conducting.<sup>40</sup> Mahler also admired Arnold Schoenberg's music. Schoenberg utilized chromaticism, which later developed into his twelve-tone system, and also chose subjects exploring the internal world and sexuality. He revolted against Western musical tradition through, as he dubbed it, "the emancipation of dissonance." In the song cycle *The Hanging Gardens* (1908-1909), he eschewed reliance upon tonality and drew out the sexuality of Stefan George's original poems.<sup>41</sup> In full bloom and in decay, the garden became a symbol for the health of the lovers' love. In a 1907 letter to his friend and modern composer Richard Strauss, Mahler noted, "I heard the new *Schoenberg* quartet [String Quartet in D minor] yesterday and found it so profound and impressive that I cannot but recommend it most emphatically for the Dresden Festival."<sup>42</sup> In 1904 Mahler joined Schoenberg in founding the Association of Creative Musicians and served as Honorary President.<sup>43</sup> In January 1905 he helped Schoenberg with the premiere of *Pelleas und Melisande*. Although his own compositions may have been more traditional, Mahler's support for Schoenberg is indicative of his links to the new ideas and cultural expressions that were characteristic of late nineteenth-century Vienna. In his role as conductor, he proved to be an advocate for, and eager employer of contemporary composers.

Mahler interacted with *avant garde* movements in his collaboration with Alfred Roller, principal stage designer at the Vienna Opera from 1903 onwards.<sup>44</sup> Mahler met Roller through his wife, who had known him from her childhood. During their first meeting, Roller noted how he admired Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde*, but while he found the music amazing, the scenery and staging of all productions of the opera left him unsatisfied, for they "destroyed the whole illusion."<sup>45</sup> Mahler inquired how Roller would do things differently, and, based upon his "unfolding schemes of such magnificence," Mahler employed Roller the following day. This appointment, Alma Mahler notes, was, "a colossal risk, as Roller had never in his life before been behind the scenes; and there were indeed the most absurd ructions during rehearsal."<sup>46</sup> Roller, as a Secession artist, created non-traditional background scenery for Mahler's performances and his first work with the Opera was the February 1903 production of *Tristan und Isolde*. Like other *fin-de-siècle* artists, Roller accessed the drama's psychological side; he did not try to replicate a natural environment but instead created an "anti-naturalistic" effect.<sup>47</sup>

In 1910, Mahler consulted Sigmund Freud for, according to his wife Alma, he had "realized that he had lived the life of a neurotic."<sup>48</sup> He expressed doubts about the value of his music and shared that his father had abused his mother. During one violent episode between his parents, young Mahler had run out of the house and encountered a hurdy-gurdy musician playing a Viennese song on the street. This collision of tragedy and 'light amusement,' Mahler felt, had

<sup>40</sup> George Tolhurst, "The Wagner Controversy." *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular* 16, no. 374 (Apr. 1, 1874), 459.

<sup>41</sup> Schorske, 345.

<sup>42</sup> Herta Blaukopf, ed., *Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss Correspondence, 1888-1911*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996), 96.

<sup>43</sup> Stephen E. Hefling, "Gustav Mahler and Arnold Schonberg," in Herta Blaukopf, ed., *Mahler's Unknown Letters*, trans. Richard Stokes (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 167-176; Johnson, 242.

<sup>44</sup> Peattie, 109.

<sup>45</sup> Donald Mitchell, ed., *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, trans. Basil Creighton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 54.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, 234.

<sup>48</sup> Mitchell, 175.

haunted his compositions and prevented him from achieving a nobler expression of emotions.<sup>49</sup> Although “Freud’s diagnosis composed Mahler’s mind,” Mahler refused to accept all of Freud’s conclusions. For example, he did not agree with Freud’s assessment of his “fixation on his mother.”<sup>50</sup> Mahler’s exchange with Freud can be regarded as similar to his approach to music and contemporary musical innovations: he could appreciate innovation and change but did not always endeavor to understand or change himself and his creations in line with new ideas. In aiding artists like Roller and Schoenberg, Mahler showed himself to be aware and supportive of various social and cultural transitions in contemporary Vienna. He was both a traditionalist, and a proponent for new explorations in music and culture. His music did not reflect the ideas and movements of late nineteenth-century Viennese culture as deeply as the atonal and experimental music of some of his contemporaries, but he was a prominent presence in Viennese society and he both influenced, and was influenced by, the cultural movements of his day. It is no accident that in Theodor Zasche’s painting *The Social Parade on the Ringstrasse*, Mahler figures prominently with the other members of elite society.<sup>51</sup> He knew and actively supported artists who gave Vienna its avant garde reputation and his performances made him a familiar figure.

Though Mahler’s compositions are decidedly more late-romantic than *avant garde*, his work as conductor changed the Vienna Opera. He experimented with repertoire and performance and did things previous conductors of the Vienna Opera simply did not, or dared not, do. In keeping with his renowned discipline, Mahler did not allow the star singers to dominate and employed standards for the audience as listeners.<sup>52</sup> He darkened the auditorium to highlight the importance of the music and to ensure that his audiences received the full message he wished the music to convey. In a city rich in musical history and tradition, Mahler challenged prevailing trends and brought the Opera to higher standards of excellence. His appointment to the Vienna Court Opera was not solely due to his high standards. Unlike the anti-Semitic critics mentioned below, other members of the press eagerly awaited Mahler’s arrival because of his choices in repertoire. Addressing rumours that Mahler would be made director of the opera, critic Karl Kraus remarked, “Then, presumably, the repertoire of our court Opera will no longer consist exclusively of *Cavalleria rusticana*; native Austrian composers will no longer have their manuscripts returned to them unread.”<sup>53</sup> Viennese audiences expected Mahler to be a demanding conductor and to play contemporary music representative of Austria. Mahler realized his audiences might not be immediately receptive to his choices and told his friend Eduard Wlassack, “It is now all-important for me to introduce myself artistically in Vienna as advantageously as possible.”<sup>54</sup> As part of this introduction, he performed a Wagner piece and *Fidelio* because they “should satisfy both the Wagnerians and the classicists.”<sup>55</sup> Mahler felt he had to first cater to the expectations of Viennese audiences, but also planned what he wished to achieve once he had endeared himself to the people:

The main thing after that would be to sketch out a plan of campaign for next season and to prepare *new* productions and *new works*... This way we should

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>51</sup> Peattie, 130-31.

<sup>52</sup> Marcel Prawy, “Gustav Mahler as Director of the Vienna Opera,” in Sigrid Wiesmann, ed., *Gustav Mahler in Vienna*, trans. Anne Shelley (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1976), 80.

<sup>53</sup> Blaukopf, *Documentary Study*, 211.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

already be able to make a start on widening this wretchedly restricted repertoire in the course of the coming season.<sup>56</sup>

In the first five years of his appointment, Mahler performed new pieces and produced some of the same repertoire as previous conductors, but in a “completely new form.”<sup>57</sup> In *Le nozze di Figaro*, he restored cut scenes and removed embellishments. In *Così fan tutte*, he played the recitatives himself as would have originally been done in Mozart's era. In his collaboration with Alfred Roller, Mahler's new stage productions involved the use of scenery that matched the work and its spirit, rather than re-using similar scenes for multiple productions.<sup>58</sup>

Anti-Semitism was a major aspect of Viennese society. Mahler arrived in Vienna in 1897, the same year that Karl Lueger became mayor.<sup>59</sup> Karl Lueger's platform as a member of the Christian Social Party used anti-Semitism to garner support. Emperor Franz Joseph was initially hesitant to approve Lueger's election, but once Lueger did assume office, the coincidence of his and Mahler's new positions beginning at roughly the same time was not lost on members of the press. One reporter, for instance, queried, “is it opportune openly to appoint a Jew to the German opera of a city in which a strong movement against the fearsome Jewification of art is just cutting a path?”<sup>60</sup> Mahler's audiences often found his dramatic and highly physical style of conducting shocking and many papers caricatured him.<sup>61</sup> In one cartoon, entitled “A Hyper-Modern Conductor,” Mahler is depicted as a flurry of activity with fast moving arms, and exaggerated gestures and body contortions.

Especially in Vienna, such depictions were often seen through an anti-Semitic lens and Mahler's physicality became associated with Jewish otherness.<sup>62</sup> One paper reported, “Mahler's left hand often jerks convulsively, marking the Bohemian magic circle”<sup>63</sup> The paper contrasted this jerkier style with that of Hans Richter, a German conductor who was passed over for Mahler's position: “How much better is the style of our own Hans Richter, who is certainly no less inspired by the Wagnerian muse than Mahler. The majestic calm, every movement to the point, not a single insignificant or unnecessary gesture. It is Richter's restraint that reveals the master.”<sup>64</sup> The contrast made between Mahler's passionate conducting, and the apparently calm and rational Richter is reinforced by the drawn outline of two silhouettes. Mahler's silhouette leans toward his orchestra and his hand beckons with a crooked finger.<sup>65</sup> His position is so exaggerated it is difficult to believe that he could ever remain upright. Richter's silhouette, contrastingly, is upright and stately. He employs smaller, more refined hand gestures and does not fall victim to passionate contortions or frenetic energy.<sup>66</sup> The association of Richter with refined mastership and Mahler with animalistic irrationality is blatant and is reflective of the prejudices Mahler encountered while conducting in Vienna.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Prawy, 81.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 81- 83.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, 250.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>61</sup> Wiesmann, 125.

<sup>62</sup> Johnson, p. 256.

<sup>63</sup> Blaukopf, *Documentary Study*, 217.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 151.

In February 1899, Mayor Lueger intentionally insulted Mahler by inviting Felix Mottl to conduct a special Philharmonic concert.<sup>67</sup> This was partially done in protest over Mahler's orchestral arrangement of Beethoven's A Minor Quartet. Mahler added an E flat clarinet to the *Coriolan* Overture, a change that elicited much criticism: "If Herr Mahler wants to make correction let him set about Mendelssohn or Rubinstein – that's something of course the Jews will never put up with – but let him just leave our Beethoven in peace."<sup>68</sup> The belief that Mahler should only meddle with the music of Jewish composers and had no right adjusting the work of the Austro-German Beethoven is illustrative of the limits placed on him because of his Jewish background. These struggles likely influenced his desire to be open to the musical traditions and innovations of different cultures and composers. His willingness to feature cultural diversity in his repertoire can be regarded as a challenge to the rising anti-Semitic current.

Mahler stepped up to the podium in Vienna during a time of rising unrest. In the latter part of the century, Vienna's immigrant population was quickly growing, and the ensuing ethnic and racial tensions likely played a part in Lueger's success.<sup>69</sup> There was debate over the Czech language, particularly in regards to the 1897 Badeni Ordinance calling for the official recognition and use of both Czech and German within Bohemia. Other nationalities within the empire, such as those identifying as Austro-German, did not want to tolerate this favoritism. In the midst of such tensions, Mahler performed Bedřich Smetana's *Dalibor*, an opera dealing with Czech resistance to foreign occupation. Mahler's decision to perform it on October 4, 1897, the emperor's "Name Day," only added to the controversy.<sup>70</sup> Smetana, as William Everett notes, wanted *Dalibor* to excite a sense of nationalism among Czechs.<sup>71</sup> It was written as an epic featuring large choral parts and drawing heavily from Czech history. Shortly after the premiere, demonstrators reacted against the Badeni Ordinance, and Prime Minister Badeni was dismissed.<sup>72</sup> This incident was not the first time Mahler demonstrated his affinity for Smetana. Indeed, Mahler was an avid supporter of the composer throughout his career. He was first exposed to Smetana in 1885 when he was conductor at the German theater in Prague and an attendee of the Czech National Theater. In a letter written in the summer of 1886, Mahler noted his immediate fascination with the composer:

Incidentally, I have several times been to the Bohemian National Theatre here and have heard a number of works by *Smetana*, Glinka Dvorak, etc., and I must confess that Smetana in particular strikes me as very remarkable. Even if his operas will certainly never form part of the repertory in Germany, it would be worth while presenting such an entirely original and individual composer to audiences as cultivated as those in Leipzig.<sup>73</sup>

In Hamburg, he performed four of Smetana's operas and with this later Viennese production of *Dalibor*, Mahler personally worked on all aspects of the opera production, "from décor and

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<sup>67</sup> Wiesmann, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Blaukopf, *Documentary Study*, 218.

<sup>69</sup> Knittel, 16.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, 252.

<sup>71</sup> William Everett, "Opera and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Croatian and Czech Lands," *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 35 no. 1 (2004), 66.

<sup>72</sup> Blaukopf, "First Season," 332.

<sup>73</sup> Knud Martner, ed., *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser and Bill Hopkins (New York: Faber and Faber, 1979), 97.

costumes to the manner in which the singers sang their arias.”<sup>74</sup> Mahler's choice of Smetana was not idle or random. It indicates Mahler's ability to make a political statement and to show support for the Czech people.

Mahler's repertoire appears speckled with unusual premieres or productions but he did not try to completely remake the Vienna Opera repertoire; he still included classic Viennese composers such as Beethoven and Mozart. If anything, his inclusion of the classical canon only made his more unusual choices appear more prevalent. For instance, he premiered Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>75</sup> Although such a piece was not necessarily controversial, the heated context in which Mahler performed it made it so. With rising cultural and national tensions within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, some groups turned to pan-Slavism as a unifying force.

Pan-Slavism could appeal to a variety of peoples living in Eastern Europe, including Slovaks, Czechs, Slovenians, Serbians and Bulgarians. The Austro-Hungarian government had reason to fear the potential of Slavic peoples uniting, or at least calling upon their larger Slavic brother, Russia, to aid their nationalistic causes. Because of this fear, one paper questioned Mahler's premiere of *Eugene Onegin*: “Do we wish to celebrate the triumph of pan-Slavism in the Hofoper?”<sup>76</sup> On 13 November 1900, Mahler premiered a new work by Josef Reiter entitled *Der Bundschuh*, which treated the story of a peasants' revolt in Upper Austria. Critic Max Graf noted that it was a “piece of historical folk art” with an “earthy character” to it.<sup>77</sup> Mahler did not confine himself to one side of the nationalist controversies; he chose to perform pieces by composers of different nationalities and subjects. Aside from these more controversial choices, Mahler premiered many contemporary pieces such as Ruggero Leoncavallo's *La Bohème*—another piece that distanced him from the more traditional proclivities of previous conductors.<sup>78</sup> Choosing a recent composition was not frequent practice in the classical music community but Mahler proved willing to take chances on lesser known composers.

Mahler became the director of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in 1898. By holding these positions at the same time, he became an even bigger figure in the Habsburg Empire's classical music community.<sup>79</sup> When he became director of the Vienna Philharmonic, he initiated reforms using the same methods as at the Opera. He used fewer soloists and would not allow applause between movements.<sup>80</sup> In terms of repertoire, he performed Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Smetana and Bruckner.<sup>81</sup> Mahler eased into his new position with traditional programming. His first performance with the Philharmonic opened with traditional works by Beethoven and Mozart, but by the time of the fourth concert of his first season, Mahler had deemed his audience ready for something new. Through to the end of the season, he featured pieces that were either world, or at least Viennese premieres. These included Dvorak's *Heldenlied* and *Die Waldtaube*, Tchaikovsky's *1812 Overture* and *Manfred Symphony*, Bizet's *Roma Suite*, Liszt's *Festklänge*, Strauss's *Aus Italien*, and Bruckner's *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*. As with his productions at the Opera, Mahler's choices were studded with multicultural significance. The *1812 Overture* is a triumphant piece of Russian nationalism and victory over the French. It is striking that he chose to present this work at such a tense time. His

<sup>74</sup> Blaukopf, “First Season,” 331.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 336.

<sup>77</sup> Blaukopf, *Documentary Study*, 227.

<sup>78</sup> Blaukopf, “First Season,” 342.

<sup>79</sup> Martner, *Mahler's Concerts*, 127.

<sup>80</sup> Wiesmann, 120.

<sup>81</sup> Blaukopf, “Mahler as conductor,” 171.

decision to present a piece by Franz Liszt is also particularly interesting. Born in Hungary, Liszt, like Mahler, was from a German-speaking part of the Empire. Although his family moved to Paris while he was still young, his music nevertheless became connected with his birthplace. Liszt did not speak Hungarian, but in her Liszt memoirs, Janka Wohl recalls that it only required listening to one of his “Hungarian Rhapsodies” to realize that he was “blood of our blood, and that if his lips did not speak our language his soul spoke it all the better.”<sup>82</sup> Given the context of various nationalities struggling to be heard within the empire, Mahler's performance of Liszt could be interpreted as a way to give some of these groups a voice. In his capacity as director of the Vienna Philharmonic and as a celebrated conductor, Mahler also traveled abroad to places such as St. Petersburg, Lemberg (present day Lvov, Ukraine), and Trieste.<sup>83</sup> During these travels he was exposed to other music to add to his repertoire. It was in St. Petersburg, for instance, where he and his wife were inspired by a production of *Eugene Onegin*.<sup>84</sup>

Mahler performed multiple premieres and new productions both at the Vienna Opera and Vienna Philharmonic, but did not always have complete freedom. In 1905, the HHSTA (Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv Wien, Akten der General-Intendanz der Hoftheater, Akten der Hofoper) censored Mahler's desired production of Strauss's *Salome*.<sup>85</sup> The piece was controversial due to its eroticism and the questions it raised about sexuality.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, the lengthy “Dance of the Seven Veils,” as Laurence Kramer notes, “has the dubious distinction of being the first operatic striptease in history.”<sup>87</sup> Censorship did not always stop Mahler – when the mayor of a nearby city invited him to premiere *Salome* there instead, he readily agreed despite the fact that there was fear of a Christian Socialist demonstration.<sup>88</sup>

Although Mahler was successful and esteemed in Vienna, his relationship with the management and the singers was increasingly fractious. In addition, one of his daughters died, he was diagnosed with heart disease and the anti-Semitism that plagued his career was coming to a fever pitch. The promise of change and a more stable financial and social situation led him in the direction of the United States, and, more specifically, to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He began working in the winter of 1908 and remained there until he grew very ill in 1911 and decided to return home. Although Alma noted the devastating effect of their daughter's death on Mahler, he appeared to like New York and his experiences there. In a letter at the beginning of his term, he noted, “It is quite new for me – after the Viennese wilderness to find sympathy and thanks everywhere for the little bit that I am able to contribute.”<sup>89</sup>

Mahler certainly felt more appreciated by New York audiences who regarded him as an eminent international conductor. There was the obstacle, however, of American fear and derision toward immigrants. Mahler tried to brush such prejudices aside and noted that “A truly *native*

<sup>82</sup> “Review: Mlle. Janka Wohl's *Recollections of Liszt*,” *The Musical Times and Singing Class Circular*, 29, 542 (1888), 211-213.

<sup>83</sup> Martner, *Mahler's Concerts*, 165.

<sup>84</sup> Mitchell, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Blaukopf, *Correspondence*, 88, 91.

<sup>86</sup> Laurence Kramer, “Culture and Musical Hermeneutics: The Salome Complex,” *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 2, 3 (1990), 271.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>88</sup> Mitchell, 97.

<sup>89</sup> Letter to Carl Moll dated 16 February 1908, in Zoltan Roman, ed., *Gustav Mahler's American years, 1907-1911: a documentary history* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1989), 82.

American is a *high-minded* and *capable* person.”<sup>90</sup> He noted the fear and suspicion of other nationalities that existed in New York, but to him this fear did not fully define the American approach to different cultures. Instead, he chose to focus on the signs of cultural diversity and acceptance that he found there.

Long before Mahler arrived in New York, he was the subject of a lot of press. Rumours of his leaving the Vienna Opera and signing in New York spread even before either of these events actually took place. The U.S.’s *Musical Courier* bragged that it “was the first newspaper to report that Gustav Mahler had resigned from the Vienna Opera,” and noted Mahler’s reputation for harsh discipline and artistic vision:

Now comes the cabled report from Europe that the great conductor has been signed for the Wagner performances at the Metropolitan next season. This ought to be good news to the American musical world, for Mahler is noted as an adamant disciplinarian...In Vienna, Mahler made the conductor's word law over the singers<sup>91</sup>

Though it was expected that pieces by Wagner would be prominent, Mahler was assured artistic control over repertoire and style. According to *Musical America*, his contract was structured in such a way that “he will have much more authority than has fallen to the lot of any of his predecessors.”<sup>92</sup> Mahler’s freedom to make choices about repertoire, artistry, production, and audience etiquette was largely founded in his established reputation. As a 1908 edition of the *New York Times* stated, “Mr. Mahler is at the present time one of the most distinguished personalities in the world of music. He is admittedly one of the greatest and most individual of conductors.”<sup>93</sup> It is evident that Mahler used this freedom to further his goals for a culturally diverse repertoire that could both challenge and seduce his audiences in an accessible manner.

While management gave Mahler free reign in terms of how he conducted and rehearsed, there was an understanding, as noted above, that he would feature Wagner in his repertoire. Before he left for New York the *Neue Freie Presse* questioned “Is it true, Herr Director, that you will conduct only Wagner and Mozart operas [in New York]?” Mahler replied, “It is only agreed that I will not conduct 'Parsifal,' otherwise I will also conduct works by other composers.”<sup>94</sup> New York audiences favoured Italian pieces and before Mahler's appearance in January, there were few German selections. This was a trend the critics remarked would change with Mahler.<sup>95</sup> Although he was aware of the preference for Italian works, Mahler chose to play operas by Wagner and other Austro-Germans, such as *Die Walküre*, *Don Giovanni*, *Siegfried* and *Fidelio* in his first season.<sup>96</sup> After he established himself in New York, just as in Vienna, critics and audiences noted Mahler's high standards and willingness to test traditional boundaries:

Beethoven's 'Fidelio' was produced...last evening for the first time in more than three years – and for the first time in many more years than that, if by

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Zoltan Roman, ed. *Gustav Mahler's American years, 1907-1911: a documentary history* (Stuyvesant: Pendragon Press, 1989), 23.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>93</sup> *New York Times*, December 29, 1908, part six, 2.

<sup>94</sup> Roman, 37.

<sup>95</sup> *New York Times*, January 2, 1908, 9.

<sup>96</sup> *New York Times*, February 8, 1908, 7; *New York Times*, February 2, 1908, 8.

'production' is meant an adequate, well-considered, and thoroughly prepared treatment of the great master's only opera...He [Mahler] makes no fetich [sic] of great masterpieces, and refuses to be bound by tradition, or even by the letter of the text.<sup>97</sup>

Although Mahler featured Austro-German pieces that were unusual for New York audiences, he also approved of making the repertoire more characteristically American. In February 1908 Mr. Otto H. Kahn, the president of the Metropolitan Grand Opera Company, made a statement regarding the use of the English libretto of Weber's *Oberon*: "It has been the idea of a number of directors for a long time now that the Metropolitan Opera House would be more truly a national institution if English opera were given there. Mr. Dippel, Mr. Mahler and I have discussed this recently and we believe that such a course would be an improvement"<sup>98</sup> Mahler's support for English operas in New York was reminiscent of his use of Hungarian librettos in Budapest. However, Mahler's tenure at the Metropolitan ended early, due to his death, so it is unclear how such contextually-sensitive tweaks and alterations would have changed his overall repertoire.

Mahler's focus on audience accessibility was interwoven with his interest in featuring traditions and innovations from varied cultural backgrounds. New York, like Budapest, was physically expanding and growing in social and cultural variety. This made broad accessibility particularly important. The city functioned as a center for culture, industry and international finance and with each new influx of immigrants from places such as Italy, China and Ireland, the makeup of the city changed on both grand and neighbourhood scales. The last quarter of the nineteenth century marked a climax for German immigration and an increased rush of Eastern Europeans streaming into the United States.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps in part to appeal to these communities, Mahler, on 19 February 1909, conducted the American premiere of Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*. The production was enthusiastically received, but the Metropolitan management was concerned that there would be a negative reaction and, to be safe, scheduled *Fidelio* (which was a success the previous season) for the next night.<sup>100</sup> Perhaps they should not have been worried, since there was much interest in the piece. Prior to the premiere, *The New York Times* reported:

[The] opera is called one of the most truly Bohemian and popular in the spirit of any...the Metropolitan is fortunate in having a great Bohemian conductor who will produce the work...And there will be another touch of national color put into the work by the engagement of a company of Bohemian dancers.<sup>101</sup>

Interestingly, although the *Bartered Bride* is considered a folk opera, it only quotes one folk song directly. Nevertheless, its style is inspired by folk music and, as William Everett notes, it "soon defined Czechness in opera."<sup>102</sup> The opera's ambiguity, both in regards to its foundation in folk songs and the vaguely identified "Bohemian Village" in which it takes place, makes the piece more universal and easier to access by audiences of varied backgrounds.<sup>103</sup> Choosing to perform it demonstrated support of Czech music, but also of Czech culture more generally.

<sup>97</sup> *New York Times*, March 21, 1908, 9.

<sup>98</sup> *New York Tribune*, February 14, 1908, 7.

<sup>99</sup> Haenni, 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> Roman, 139.

<sup>101</sup> *New York Times* January 17, 1909, section 3, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Everett, 65.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

Again, the politics of language played a role in this performance. Rather than singing in the original Czech, the performers sang in German. Contemporary critics offer no explanation for this drastic change, but perhaps, as in Budapest, it was primarily a question of accessibility. The goal of ensuring the audience could comprehend the opera was more important than maintaining the opera's original language (though one article does point out a large Bohemian contingent present at the premiere, so perhaps some would have been able to understand the original libretto).<sup>104</sup> Perhaps Mahler was catering both to those who emigrated from Germany and to a contemporary admiration for German culture and language.<sup>105</sup> It could be argued that his marriage between a characteristically Czech opera and the German language is indicative of his attraction to multiculturalism and an attempt to show mutual acceptance and respect in action.

Novelty at the Metropolitan Opera continued with Mahler's selection of *The Queen of Spades*, which he performed in late February 1910. This was the first time a Tchaikovsky opera was performed in full staging in the United States. Although American audiences were familiar with Tchaikovsky's instrumental works, critics pointed out that this dramatic piece was a new way to experience Tchaikovsky. The performance of this opera in New York was also novel because of the Russian form in which it was presented. One critic noted that the opera's structure did not conform either to the Wagnerian concept of music drama nor to Italian operas. Rather, "There are arias, duets, choruses, dances, yet they are not by any means used according to the stereotyped formulas of the Italian operas. The orchestra has often an independent function. There are even suggestions of 'leading motives.'"<sup>106</sup> Mahler's love of novelty was closely tied to his forays in multiculturalism. His novel approaches (even when not blatantly multicultural) indicate a willingness to experiment with various forms of expression, be they artistic or cultural, and an enthusiasm for inspiration from a variety of sources.

Given his established reputation at the Metropolitan Opera, it is perhaps not surprising that the New York Symphony Orchestra (soon to be the New York Philharmonic) invited Mahler to be their new conductor. Critics were quite pleased by the selection: "He has not before conducted a concert performance in this city, but his activity last season at the Metropolitan Opera House as an operatic conductor made his public familiar with the reasons for the great fame he possessed as a conductor."<sup>107</sup> Mahler's repertoire choices for the Orchestra were similar to those at the Opera. Once again, he featured German pieces but also introduced more unusual choices to New York audiences. In his very first performance with the Orchestra, he conducted Beethoven's "Coriolanus" Overture, Schumann's First Symphony, Wagner's "Meistersinger" Overture, but also Smetana's Overture to *The Bartered Bride*. As Mahler would later premiere *The Bartered Bride* in its entirety at the Metropolitan Opera, this earlier performance of the Overture by the New York Symphony Orchestra offered American audiences a taste of what was to come.<sup>108</sup> Mahler played it again in January 1910, but this time added Smetana's compatriot Dvorak with his overture "In der Natur."<sup>109</sup> As in his repertoire choices at the Metropolitan Opera and in Vienna, Czech music figured prominently.

While Mahler's introduction of German and Eastern European works are the most prominent markers of his multicultural approach to repertoire in New York, he also represented

<sup>104</sup> "'Bartered Bride' at Metropolitan," *New York Times*, February 20, 1909, 7.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Horowitz, *Wagner Nights: An American History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>106</sup> Richard Aldrich, "First Production of a Tschaikowsky Opera in America this Week," *New York Times*, February 27, 1910, SM15.

<sup>107</sup> "Gustav Mahler Conducts," *New York Times*, November 30, 1908, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> "A Historical Concert," *New York Times*, January 27, 1910, 9.

other nationalities, if at times indirectly. In a conference on 10 March 1910, Mahler performed “only modern music,” comprising Debussy's “L'Après Midi d'un Faune,” Strauss's “Tod und Verklarung,” and a new piece, Ferruccio Busoni's “Turandot.” Of particular interest is “Turandot,” in which Busoni samples Chinese (as well as one Arabian) melodies. One critic noted that “Most of them are crabbed, stiff tunes, based entirely on the five-note scale of the Chinese, but he has molded and developed them in accordance with Occidental ideas of musical usage.”<sup>110</sup> Busoni hoped to make this music more than just pure “Orientalism” and the *New York Times* article discussing the piece did note that while he undoubtedly made it easier on the “Occidental ear...it is very difficult in general to avoid the tiresome aspect of non-Western music.”<sup>111</sup> While the article claims that Busoni's piece is hard on the ear, and therefore not successful in bridging cultures, there was, nonetheless, much applause at the performance and Busoni had to come out on stage in response.<sup>112</sup> True to form, Mahler had chosen a piece that made Asian melodies and themes accessible to American audiences. Mahler introduced pieces like Busoni's, with an aim to express and instill appreciation for another culture.

While away from his job in New York, Mahler continued the quest to find new and different composers. In an article discussing his trip to Europe “for a rest,” Mahler indicates that he hoped to find new scores. The article's author, for his part, hoped that Mahler would look at Scandinavian composers to this end. While Mahler did not in fact perform Scandinavian pieces, the writer nonetheless felt that Mahler could be the Scandinavian Americans' chance to hear such music.<sup>113</sup> This understanding of Mahler as a potential conduit for music representing the many ethnicities and cultures in New York and America should be noted, but Mahler did not completely change his repertoire to a more American orientation. In his final 1911 season, Mahler added new pieces from the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the form of Karl Goldmark (Hungarian) and George Enescu (Romanian). This final season also included a more English-speaking orientation. Mahler performed Elgar several times and Charles Villiers Stanford along with American composers (though sometimes European-born) such as Charles Martin Loeffler, Henry Kimball Hadley and Edward MacDowell.<sup>114</sup> Sadly because of his untimely death, it is unclear if such a trend would have continued.

Mahler felt a symphony should “reflect the whole world” and in this sense, there needed to be a synthesis of voices. The “polyglot voices” that are characteristic of his composed music reflect his diverse musical and cultural experiences.<sup>115</sup> Given Mahler's approach to choices in repertoire, it is interesting to examine whether he can rightly be labeled as an early example of multiculturalism. Mahler was never labeled as such by his contemporaries, but this may be due to the fact that such a label did not really function as a way to describe music or repertoire at this point. Mahler certainly recognized musical and cultural differences through the inclusion of pieces by composers such as Smetana and Busoni. However, it is difficult to separate the degree to which he did so out of a spirit of multiculturalism – as Kymlicka and Patton define the term – or simply for reasons of accessibility. It can be argued that a commitment to accessibility is akin to a form of multiculturalism, particularly in such socially and culturally diverse locations as

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<sup>110</sup> “Social Notes,” *New York Times*, March 11, 1910, 9.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Inga Hoegsbro, “Scandinavian Music,” *New York Times*, April 17, 1910, X8.

<sup>114</sup> New York Philharmonic performances conducted by Mahler courtesy of the New York Philharmonic Archive.

<sup>115</sup> Johnson, 250 - 254.

Vienna and New York, but Mahler's intentions are not always clear enough to confidently make such an assertion. At times, as in Budapest, it appears that his career goals took precedence over any other commitments. With regard to Czech music, however, there is solid evidence that Mahler wished to increase appreciation for Czech culture in a meaningful way. Compositions by Smetana and Dvorak come up repeatedly in Mahler's repertoire. When Mahler briefly visited Bohemia for a festival in 1908, a local newspaper noted:

This master of modern German symphony after all belonging a little to Czech music. Mahler has always been an enthusiastic admirer of Smetana's music and performed a great service in Vienna by contributing to its understanding. In view of these connections with our musical development the first conductor of the Exhibition Concerts deserves a special welcome.<sup>116</sup>

Mahler treated Czech music with respect; as his actions in Vienna, and his 1897 performance of *Dalibor* indicate, he directly engaged struggles for cultural recognition and acceptance.

Mahler's repertoire may not have actively demonstrated the same commitment to other cultures that it did for Czech peoples, but it certainly exposed audiences to new (and well-performed) pieces from various cultural and national backgrounds. In amongst the Wagner, Beethoven, and Mozart were compositions by lesser known, non-German composers, such as Ödön Mihalovich, Sandor Erkel, Bedřich Smetana and Ruggero Leoncavallo. Mahler may not have identified all cultures as equal, but his choices in repertoire did give a variety of cultures a musical voice and an audience. Throughout his career, he endeavoured to introduce audiences to new pieces and while he may not have equated diversity with equality, his work as a conductor and his choices in repertoire nevertheless had the indirect effect of providing a platform for cultural diversity. His choices in repertoire provide an opportunity to explore the complexities of multiculturalism in a late-nineteenth and early twentieth century context.

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<sup>116</sup> Blaukopf, *Documentary Study*, 256.