LINCOLN CENTER presents

Great Performers

Sunday Afternoon, May 8, 2005, at 1:45

Pre-concert lecture by James Hepokoski

Stiftung Bamberger Symphoniker–Bayerische Staatsphilharmonie
JONATHAN NOTT, *Chief Conductor*
PIERRE-LAURENT AIMARD, *Piano*

LIGETI: *Atmosphères* (1961)

MAHLER: *Adagio* from Symphony No. 10 (1910)

LIGETI: Etudes for Solo Piano
No. 7: Galamb borong; No. 8: Fém; No. 5: Arc-en-ciel; No. 10: Der Zauberlehrling;
No. 11: En suspens; No. 13: L'escalier du diable

BEETHOVEN: Piano Concerto No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 73 ("Emperor") (1809)

JAMES HEPOKOSKI, Professor of Music History and Director of the Division of Humanities at Yale University, is a specialist in symphonic and chamber music in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He graduated from the University of Minnesota and went on to complete his graduate work at Harvard University, where he received the Ph.D. in 1979. After teaching at the Oberlin College Conservatory from 1978 to 1988 and the University of Minnesota School of Music from 1988 to 1999, he joined the Yale faculty in 1999 after two half-years of visiting professorships. At Yale he teaches a wide variety of music courses, ranging from two semesters of a much-praised survey of European music history (1600 to the present), to graduate and undergraduate seminars on Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Mahler, and many other composers and styles. Students have remarked on his "lively and entertaining lectures," which often illuminate central aesthetic and historical points embedded in the central classical repertory. An expert in musical style and its cultural implications, Professor Hepokoski has studied the music of Western European and nationalist cultures for decades, and he has also published widely on Italian opera. He has been the co-editor of a leading musicological journal, *19th-Century Music*, since 1992. He is the author of five books and several dozen articles on a broad range of musical topics.

4:53

FINAL VERSION

42-44 minutes — including music

James Hepokoski
Lincoln Center
8 May 2005

Adagio (Mahler 10th, etc.)

Welcome once again to Lincoln Center, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to this afternoon's concert—Beethoven, Mahler, and Ligeti—with Jonathan Nott conducting the Bamberger Symphoniker and with guest pianist Pierre-Laurent Aimard playing a selection of Ligeti's solo Etudes from 1985 and 1988 as well as Beethoven's Emperor Concerto. In this talk, though, I'd like to focus on what might be the most challenging of today's works: the Adagio first movement from Mahler's uncompleted Tenth Symphony—with its musical high pressure, its sense of dealing with ultimate things in ultimate ways: Let's listen . . .

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 1, 0:00—1:32]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler 10th (Sym 3 & 10), track 2, 1:19-2:47, fade-out]

As many of you probably know, this Adagio, some twenty-five minutes long, is the most "complete" movement of the projected five movements of the Tenth. Mahler drafted the Tenth at a very rapid pace in Austria in May and June 1910—a year before his death—amidst grave personal circumstances that were pushing him close toward an alarming despair: concerns not only about his own frail health (an extremely serious heart condition) but also about the collapse of his marriage, upon his discovery that his wife, Alma, was having an affair with the architect Walter Gropius. Famously, in the margins of the sketches of the Tenth, he wrote anguished references to these things, cries out to Alma, and so on. The Tenth is a very personalized work.

But we're involved today only with that opening Adagio. From one perspective the piece is sonically rich and sumptuous—but yet in its high-strain, wide-ranging melodic leaps and in its wrenching, tonally "dislocated," chords, it also conveys a sense of an agonized disorientation, of a personality and a style of music *in extremis*. This fusion of opposite moods is typical of Mahler's psychologically complex music—intense exhilaration and intense despair sounded together as inseparable, not sorted out~~, so that one experiences the~~

~~paradox of feeling both at the same time~~. So we might think of this piece not just as an "Adagio" but rather as a kind of unreal or fantastic *dream* of an Adagio, one with unsettling nightmarish elements as well.

The twenty-five minute Adagio might present itself as a stand-alone symphonic movement, but its implications—its roots— extend far beyond what you will hear this afternoon. The piece is saturated with connotations, plugged into a network of European cultural history that resonates in its every moment. ~~And this is what I'd like to have us think about today~~. On the one hand, this Adagio stands at the end of a grand series of Austro-Germanic adagios stretching from Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven to Mahler—music explicitly conceived over 125 years or so to be revelations, confessions, or ultimate statements. For Mahler, merely to write a symphonic Adagio was to join hands with the broadest spiritual claims of a rich art-music tradition, one that by 1910 Mahler and many others saw as dying away. In this sense, Mahler's Adagio is an end-of-the-line valediction for what once was, and we'll spend a little time thinking about this. On the other hand, more personally, the Tenth Symphony's Adagio also participates in a web of internal relations within Mahler's own symphonic output: it was the fifth and last of the great symphonic adagios that he would compose. From that perspective, Mahler also ~~intended~~ hoped that we would listen to it as the culmination of his earlier Adagios—his final Adagio statement. Let's take up these topics one by one. So this, once again, ~~then~~, is our object for reflection: the Adagio of the Tenth:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 2, 0:00—1:32—same as Track 1]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler 10th (Sym 3 & 10), track 2, 1:19-2:47, fade-out]

In the past decade music historians have documented what has now come to be called the "cult of the Adagio" in Austro-Germanic nineteenth-century music. The idea was to distinguish "normal" slow movements—say, those in Andante tempo—from those that stilled the music down to a much slower, more contemplative tempo: the Adagio. To write a moderately paced Andante was one thing—suggesting a simpler tradition of song-like beauty and lyricism. But to write an exceptionally slow Adagio—to *dare* to write an Adagio—was to take the risk of producing something higher—to seek for the ultra-confessional statement, the transcendent, or the sublime. So not all slow movements were alike: there were the more

"normal" Andantes—and then there were the high-stakes, super-slow Adagios with their higher spiritual claims.

Let's listen to a few commentators on all this—sketching out the cultural ideology behind the Adagio. In 1885 the Wagnerian writer Ludwig Nohl had declared, "Nothing is more a product of the German way than [the] Adagio. . . . The Adagio in German sonata forms belongs to that which is most beautiful not merely in music but in art altogether." In 1862, the aging Hector Berlioz contemplated what he called the "otherworldliness" of Beethoven's adagios: in these movements, Berlioz wrote, "there are no human passions, no more earthly images, no innocent songs. . . . [Beethoven] stands exalted above humankind and has forgotten it. Removed from the earthly sphere, [Beethoven] hovers alone and peaceful in the ether." And three years earlier, 1859, the influential German music theorist and Beethoven analyst Adolph Bernhard Marx had noted that in such slow movements, a composer "retreated into his own heart, contemplating his own interiority, carrying the question, 'Who am I?' on his lips." Wrote Marx, "That question can be answered only in a still Adagio." ~~Similar statements can be found throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.~~

What these writers were referring to, more than anything else, was the reverential tone found in Beethoven's numerous slow-movement Adagios. It was Beethoven who had definitively established the Adagio tone—and we'll hear a marvelous example of one of them this afternoon in the second movement of his Fifth Piano Concerto, marked *Adagio un poco mosso*. As you recall, this B-major slow movement opens—very slowly—in the manner of a quiet and devout hymn—musical contemplation with clasped hands; pure interiority; meditative; prayerlike; suggesting a reflection on wondrous and ultimate things ....as though, now in this Beethovenian *Adagio [un poco mosso]* from 1809, the second movement of the *Emperor* Concerto, we step onto holy ground:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 3, 0:00—1:30---music starts very quietly at 0:04 or 0:05]

[original: Beethoven Piano Cto No. 5, Davis, Kovacevich, track 2, 0:00-1:25]

Giving way, once the soloist enters, to the sonic image of the single individual—the piano soloist—now in profound Adagio-thought, stilled into a rapt trance, as if contemplating

existence from far above it (as Berlioz suggested), reflecting on the cosmos itself, pondering "the hushed mystery" of Being:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 4, 0:00—1:33]

[original: Beethoven Piano Cto No. 5, Davis, Kovacevich, 2:10-3:40, fade-out]

"The nineteenth-century cult of the Adagio"—spiritual, contemplative, hymnic, claiming to participate in things beyond a merely superficial beauty. Beethoven wrote many of these as middle movements: those from the late works were especially revered by later generations (the Adagio molto e cantabile of the Ninth Symphony; the Cavatina, Adagio molto espressivo, of the op. 130 string quartet). Occasionally Beethoven turned the first movement of a sonata into an Adagio, which is what Mahler would do in the Tenth Symphony: in Beethoven's early Moonlight Sonata, for instance, or in the op. 131 string quartet's opening fugue. Also influential on Mahler was the unusual choice of an Adagio for a last movement—what Michael Talbot recently called the "valedictory finale," as famously in Beethoven's last piano sonata, op. 111.

There isn't time here to trace the fortunes of the Adagio through the nineteenth century, connecting Beethoven up to Mahler, but there is a strong and increasingly cultish line of Adagio compositions stretching between the two—especially in the works of self-consciously "heavy" or reflectively "philosophical" composers, like Brahms, Wagner, and Bruckner—lines of thought and composition with which Mahler resonated deeply. Still, after Beethoven, one also encounters a general concern among later critics and composers that the idea of a truly substantial Adagio might be no longer possible in an age of cultural decline.

There can be no doubt that Mahler, with the profundities of late Beethoven very much on his mind, directly assumed the challenge of the Adagio—indeed, of the hypermonumental, lengthy Adagio—which he turned into a Mahlerian specialty within his hypermonumentalized symphonies. As I mentioned earlier, the Tenth Symphony's Adagio is the fifth and last of Mahler's symphonic Adagios—and all of them are interrelated with each other. Mahler's symphonic Adagio movements from 1895 through 1910 constitute a separate line of musical thought on their own: five separate meditations on the

Adagio-concept and all that it had come to stand for. Each of the five absorbs and draws its predecessors into itself. In so doing, each of the five becomes weightier, more problematized, as we proceed.

The first of Mahler's great Adagios is the mammoth, twenty-two minute Adagio final movement of the sprawling, eighty-minute Third Symphony, composed largely in 1895—its sixth movement. In its original program, each of the six movements of the Third ascended a step higher in a grand chain of being, "What the flowers tell me," "What the animals tell me," "what humans, then angels, tell me," and the like. Mahler thus presented the Adagio finale of the Third to us as an ultimate revelation, with the title, "What Love Tells Me." And here we find the classic, Beethovenian Adagio style: reverently hymnic, with richly plush string textures. Finally, fully at peace, as if now above and beyond all merely human striving, inviting us to lose ourselves completely in this cosmically slow unfolding from 1895, "What Love Tells Me":

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 5, 0:00—1:00]

[original: Kubelik Mahler Sym 3 and 10, track 1, 0:00-0:55]

[note: the upcoming track 6 is blank—5 blank seconds....after track 5 is played, advance the CD to track 7]

This being Mahler, that movement won't stay ~~that~~ fully peaceful for long, but at least it starts out with that sense of total serenity. We sense the same serenity and stillness at the opening of the Fourth Symphony's Adagio from five years later, 1900—its third movement. At an early stage of its composition, Mahler called it "The Smiling of St. Ursula"—and at the time Natalie Bauer-Lechner reported that the composer had told her that while composing it "[he] had a childhood image of his mother's face in mind, recalling how she had laughed through grieving and had smiled through tears, for she had suffered unendingly yet had always lovingly resolved and forgiven everything." This is a perfect background-image for a "revelatory" symphonic Adagio in this Fourth Symphony, opening with its sense of circularity and stability, of calm, of the heartbeat-throbbing of loving protection in the low pizzicatos, and above, of the dissolution of all that is material into the air. The Fourth Symphony's Adagio from 1900:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 7, 0:00—1:00]

[original: Karajan, Mahler Sym 4, track 3, 0:00—0:57 , fade-out]

[note: the upcoming track 8 is blank—5 blank seconds....after track 7 is played, advance the CD to track 9]

characteristic 19th c Romantic images

Associations with the feminine as forgiver and redeemer also pervade Mahler's next Adagio: this is the slow movement or Adagietto (the little Adagio) of the Fifth Symphony from 1901-02, the period of his engagement and 1902 marriage to Alma Schindler—Alma Mahler to be. The Adagietto is the fourth of its five movements, and it is Mahler's shortest Adagio, about half the length of the others. This shorter movement is a "song without words" for strings and harp. And famously—and controversially—the conductor Wilhelm Mengelberg claimed to have been told that this Fifth-Symphony Adagietto was "Gustav Mahler's declaration of love to Alma," a kind of "love-letter," in other words, the composer's projected solution to life's problems in love and hope. To be sure, scholars have disagreed about Mengelberg's claim—but in any event here in the Fifth's Adagietto we sense even more exquisitely that slow-movement, Mahlerian quality of material dissolution, the melting of sonority into a gauzy, permeable airiness, the departure from the normal material world, feeling palpably every sonority, chord, and dissonance. Here's the Fifth's Adagietto, Mahler's third Adagio movement, composed in 1901-02:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 9, 0:00—1:12—starts around 0:04: very soft: turn up the volume a bit at the opening]

[original: Inbal, Mahler Symphony No. 5, track 4, 0:00-1:13, fade-out]

[note: the upcoming track 10 is blank—5 blank seconds....after track 9 is played, advance the CD to track 11]

The Adagietto of the Fifth might be regarded as the last of Mahler's mostly "positive" or "redemptive" Adagios. In the Ninth and Tenth Symphonies from 1908 through 1910, Mahler brought these slow movements into altogether new territory. They now took on an anguished, world-weary tone. The plush textures are still there; the connotational apparatus of the Adagio is still very much present, resonating historically. But Mahler, that most tormented, philosophical, spiritually questioning of composers, was now confronting death face-to-face, after the sudden scarlet-fever death of his beloved daughter Maria in 1907 and

the diagnosis of his own severe heart condition in the same year, effectively restricting his physical activity and guaranteeing that he could not expect to live much longer with such a frail heart. At the time Mahler was only 47 years old—now in 1907 with the mark of death on him.

The D-flat major Adagio of the Ninth from 1908-09, Mahler's fourth symphonic Adagio, is the first to inhabit this world of exhaustion at or beyond despair, a world that intermixes the high intensity and contemplative richness of the traditional, reverential Adagio with unprepared harmonic and melodic twists that suggest that something has gone terribly wrong, or that suggest that something important—a foundational security or hope—has been lost and that we are now setting out, rudderless, into an immense and troubling space of.....we know not what. As often remarked, the finale of the Ninth seems like an *Angst*-ridden farewell, a valediction to life, to tonality, or perhaps even to the enterprise of art music itself.

Mahler's three previous Adagios had started their grand, cyclical motions directly with measure 1, right at their openings. Now in the Ninth, Mahler preceded the "stepping onto" the vast, slow-moving Adagio-Wheel with a short but intense, twenty-five-second introduction for first and second violins, playing in unison, *forte*. This brief opening gesture serves as an entrance-ramp onto the Adagio proper, as if in it the composer were heaving a huge, knowing sigh of what is to come. As if to say, "Once more, one last time, one last time, into the breach....one last time"..... and then, after the deep sigh of resignation, Mahler, once again, steps onto the slow circularities of the hymnic Adagio of now-painful farewell. The Adagio of the Ninth from 1908-09 (even slower in this late-Bernstein recording):

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 11, 0:00—1:16]

[original: Bernstein, Concertgebouw, Mahler Sym 9, track 9.....0:00-1:16 ..... fade-out]

If this music is a farewell to life, a "final musical statement," what could possibly follow it? And that, of course, brings us again to today's piece, Mahler's last Adagio, here placed as the opening movement to the projected Tenth Symphony, from Summer 1910, the symphony that his death in 1911, shortly before his 51st birthday, prevented him from completing. Summer 1910: his frail heart and health a constant threat; the huge blow upon

learning of Alma's marital infidelity, with the implication that his feminine salvation-figure from the Fifth Symphony was about to leave him forever. Summer 1910: the year that Mahler consulted Sigmund Freud in Vienna [Brussels?] for treatments in psychoanalysis—for a deeper exploration of his own, inner psychological world.

This first movement of the Tenth rethinks the farewell-finale of the Ninth—its immediate predecessor—as though Mahler were now totally recomposing that movement in even more strained and negative conditions. Here we encounter a personal brokenness beyond mere valediction. Here in the Tenth's Adagio, everything threatens to collapse altogether if not held together by an enormous force of personal will. This is the final stage in the long history of the tonal Adagio. The concept cannot be pushed further. The Tenth's twenty-five minute Adagio, with its gigantic intervallic leaps that veer away from any containability within any single register (no voice could sing this hymn!)—and with its cross-cut, contradictory harmonies that suggest sudden, painful, chromatic incursions from the outer reaches of other keys, regular disorientations and losses of normal diatonic control. And yet—another contradiction—the plush, sonically indulgent Adagio, hymnic texture is still there, reminding us of its historical tradition and its encounter with ultimate things.

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 12, 0:00—1:03]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler Symphony 3 and 10, track 2, 1:19-2:17, fade-out]

[note: the upcoming track 13 is blank—5 blank seconds....after track 12 is played, advance the CD to track 14]

But although the music that we just heard begins the Adagio itself, it does not begin the movement. You recall that Mahler had provided the Ninth's Adagio with that entrance-ramp huge sigh in unison in the strings, "Once more...into the breach...one last time." Well, here in the Tenth we have the same thing, only much more extensively and even more wearily. This entrance-ramp opening of the Tenth—the approach to the Adagio proper—is extended to around *eighty* seconds—almost four times longer than the parallel passage in the Ninth. (This is one reason that I've provided you with a photocopy of the first page of Mahler's short score for this movement—his essential composition draft.) You can see this introduction on the top line of your short-score photocopy, stretching all the way across that top line, in fifteen measures. Notice that it's not marked Adagio, but Andante. In

other words, it's not yet the "metaphysical" Adagio….it's only a drained, Andante approach to it, as if pondering, beyond exhaustion, what must come….before, once again, we step onto the grand, cosmically rotating Adagio (which you can see on the next line down—where Mahler has written "Adagio"). The single-line introduction, eighty seconds, is given over to the unison violas, *pianissimo*, as the melody twists chromatically here and there, as if lost, and searching for a tonal center and key—any key…an entrance-ramp of insecurity and absence—a series of weary "musical questions":

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 14, 0:00—1:53]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler Symphony 3 and 10, track 2, 0:00-1:53, fade-out]

I keep referring to the slow-moving Adagio Wheel or rotational circularity onto which one steps. And keeping that image in mind will help us to keep track of what happens in this twenty-five-minute movement. It's easy to get lost in the middle of all this, but here's a suggestion. Think of the basic materials of this Adagio as the motion around a slow-moving clock-face. The circular motion actually comprises three musical ideas: the viola introduction, the Adagio theme proper, and a second Adagio idea into which the first one flows. Again: Introduction; Adagio Theme A (with the big intervals); flowing directly right into Adagio Theme B (which we haven't heard yet). This Theme B first appears about three minutes into the movement—about one minute after the point where we just stopped. You can recognize Theme B by its upper-voice melody-rhythm ( ) and especially by the use of pizzicato plucking in the lower voices ( ). *{On the photocopies—if you can read them—this is located on the third system down, over to the right………}* This is Adagio Theme B, about three minutes into the piece:

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 15, 0:00—0:42]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler Sym 3 and 10, track 2, 2:47-ca. 3:20, fade-out]

All right. To make a long story short (and to bring this talk to a conclusion): The first trip around that rotational cycle, INTRO, THEME A, THEME B, takes Mahler about four

minutes. He then embarks on another round trip—INTRO, THEME A, THEME B—where each of the ideas is revisited, but with deepened variants, becoming more complex and lasting longer. An initial two cycles, two slow turns of the cosmic wheel, now bring us about ten minutes into the piece. (Just keep thinking of this vast, slow turning.) And then a third and a fourth rotation ensue, each one more anguished, more contemplative, more tense.

Ultimately, a fifth rotation of the wheel breaks open to let in a horrific tonal crisis, unprecedented in any Adagio before this—the dam finally breaks—about seventeen minutes into the piece (you can't miss it): a sudden, despairing, *fortissimo* flood of A-flat minor that within another minute leads to the most famous moment of this work and one of the most famous musical sounds of the early twentieth century: a huge, sustained cloud of dissonance, sheer sound as sound, *fortissimo*—first a stack of seven different notes, then eight, then finally nine different notes, a dissonant stack of thirds piled up on top of one another. This is the sonic image of a world coming unglued----like Edvard Munch's famous painting of "The Scream"—the inbreaking of the ultimate disorientation, that which can no longer be repressed …… under the highest emotional pressure, music itself falling apart. seventeen minutes in

[MUSIC: Burned CD TRACK 16, 0:00—1:40]

[caution! starts quite loud—turn down the volume a bit for the opening!]

[original: Kubelik, Mahler Symphony 3 and 10, track 2, 16:48 [caution: LOUD!!!]—18:41, fade-out]

As I said, you can't miss it. ~~Curiously,~~ This passage ~~may~~ must have meant something highly personal to Mahler and to his wife Alma in Summer 1910. The short score that you have as a handout is the first page of a complete sketch of the whole movement in nine pages. But the pages with the nine-note "scream" no longer exist. They have been removed. Scholarly speculation is that Alma Mahler herself removed them after Gustav's death, probably because they must have contained some marginal explanations or outcries that she did not want posterity to find. *(I might only add that the nine-note "scream," covering many octaves, is an obvious forerunner to the very first sound that you will hear on this concert: the opening minute of Ligeti's famous Atmosphères from 1960, a huge, but pianissimo tone-cluster containing all twelve of the chromatic notes spread out over many*

octaves. Ligeti's Atmophèrers begins as Mahler's Scream now denatured, 1960,and turned into an abstract object for subsequent sound manipulation.)

Be that as it may, once Mahler's "scream" experience has occurred, the Adagio movement of the Tenth Symphony takes about five more minutes to dissolve away completely…..to fade into thin air, or so it seems—another instance of Mahler's famously eloquent, "dissolving-away" endings, as also in *Das Lied von der Erde* and the Ninth Symphony. And perhaps it's time at this point for us to dissolve away as well—and to get ready for what promises to be a wonderful concert experience, replete with more than one Adagio.

END

5:35

Andante
Adagio