Judge Dennis Davis | Gustav Mahler

- Good evening everybody and welcome back. Tonight Judge Dennis will talk about how Mahler's music speaks centrally to both the deeply personal and the broader questions of life. This talk will focus on the fifth symphony and its optimism for life, and the sixth with a far bleaker set of threats. Dennis will show how this magnificent music speaks to our condition, even though written more than 100 years ago. Welcome Dennis, and thank you once again, and I'm now going to hand over to you.

- Thank you Wendy. It's always a pleasure and a privilege to talk at this event. I should tell you that I have been inundated with various people who gave me a series of anecdotes about the Port Elizabeth Jewish community and a Reverend Levy. I think I'll leave those over to when I talk about the Irving trial in the future, Irving and Lipton trial, and then mention some of these very interesting anecdotes which I think are worthy of sharing with people. And I also just want to thank to start with both Shawna and Claudette, my wife, because without them, none of this would've happened because I think we wouldn't have heard any of the music, which I'm hoping you will hear this evening.

So this is a sense, our journey in relation to Mahler. And it's a journey which I think we're halfway on because there is remaining things for me to talk about the ninth symphony, which is the extraordinary premonitions of what was to happen in Europe in the 20th century. And I think that should be coupled with Arnold Schoenberg's eight minutes War Symphony, the eight minutes that he composed about the Warsaw ghetto and his tribute to the survivors thereof. But that's for a future date. I'm not going to traverse everything we spoke about in our previous event, but I do want to make a couple of interesting comments.

It strikes me that one of the most extraordinary things about so much of what has been discussed in Trudy's wonderful lectures over quite a period now in which we've learned so much, and David's particularly insightful talk this afternoon about Sherlock that what we are talking about so often, when she spoke about Israeli, or today when David was trying to explicate upon the character of Sherlock, the enigmatic character of Sherlock, what we were talking about were two fundamental points. One is the concept of alienation as a Jew and the second was the integration of a Jew into secular society. And it strikes me that, as I indicated to you in the last lecture, that is precisely the dilemma that faced Gustav Mahler. It is precisely what makes for me Gustav Mahler such a fascinating character apart from being the extraordinary composer that he undoubtedly was.

You will recall that last time I suggested to you that one of the famous statements that Mahler made, not only early in his life but quite throughout his life, was when he said that in Austria he was regarded as a bohemian, and then in Germany he was regarded as an Austrian, and throughout the world he was regarded as a Jew. "Always," he said, "the outsider." And that profound remark which essentially reflects exactly this problem of alienation, this idea that I am Jewish, but I have these extraordinary talents that speak in the secular world. How then does

one negotiate that, how does one actually move through the world when you are in that sort of position? Now that then raises another interesting aspect about Gustav Mahler, and it is this. Much debate in music about whether music should actually be, as it were, appreciated and interpreted purely choir music.

That is music has its own meaning intrinsic to music and it's not extrinsic means you can't, as it were, treat music as it were a piece of literature and try to pass different kinds of meanings out of the text in the way you would, a musical text as the way you would do a literary text. There's a great deal of debate about that. What is particularly interesting to me about Mahler are a number of features which essentially raised this question very profoundly. In the first place, all of Mahler's symphonies, all of Mahler's symphonies have a hero. And that is unquestionably Mahler. Mahler is at the centre of all of these symphonies one way or the other, and we're going to see this tonight, particularly in the fifth and I suspect in the sixth.

They were there, they were present in the first and the second to which I had made references in our earlier engagement with Mahler, and they're here tonight. And of course, Mahler's famous remark that he made when he said that a symphony, as it were, should be like the world, it should encompass the world, it should encompass everything. Mahler's symphonies do that, but what they also encompass is Mahler's life. And that's why Derek Cook, a musicologist who wrote a lot about Mahler and in fact was one of the people who reconstructed the Mahler 10th symphony. Recall I said Mahler wrote nine symphonies.

His 10th symphony was never completed and was completed by others, one of which was completed by Cook. Cook wrote as follows, "Mahler's inner conflict was the eternal war between innocence and experience, idealism and realism, affirmation and denial, of a basically life-loving nature, he was confronted from the beginning with the problems of cruelty, pain, and death. And thus was the question of the value and purpose of human life." So this was somebody who, as it were, lived the existential process of angst throughout his life. And if you combine that with this process of alienation to which I've already made reference, you can see that inevitably this would effect his symphonies and inevitably they would shape the music that he wrote. And that is essentially the backdrop to trying to understand Mahler's music.

And I want to suggest this evening that it's music that speaks to all of us because it's music, as I will try to show, which speaks to our condition. One of the issues about Mahler, and I'll leave this to the last of my Mahler lectures, but let me put this to you right up front. There's no question that Mahler lives at the cusp between classical music. I mean, he's revering of Beethoven, et al, and Mozart, which is perfectly understandable since he was the greatest conductor of his generation, maybe of all time, but certainly the generation. And he would've totally been immersed in this music, and peering into the new 20th century with new forms of music. And essentially Almon Berg, Berg and Schonberg, they were people who essentially developed an eternal scheme of music. They were mentees of Mahler, they adored Mahler. And Mahler stands at the cusp of this, and Mahler stands peering, looking at the 20th century that is going to contain all sorts of vicissitudes and of tragedies, and he foresees them.

And we will see this part in the sixth symphony. But by goodness will we see it in the ninth in a manner which perhaps no other symphonic work or piece of music has ever foreshadowed. So that's my way of introduction, and it's important that I introduce us 'cause the fifth symphony has so much by way of autobiographical material. Now, that's not to say that when Mahler writes this music, it's music which he's seeking, as it were, to write as an autobiographical text in the way we would see a literary text. It is to suggest that the way he employs the music is very reflective of his own condition, his own perspective, and his own attempt at a hero negotiating the fundamental existential problems of life and death and the meaning of life. What does life mean for all of us, a point I suspect all of us contemplate now in the kind of unprecedented pandemic in which we all find ourselves.

So onto the fifth symphony. And the point about the fifth symphony which I found absolutely extraordinary is just how much of the life experience is contained within. Mahler starts to write the symphony in 1901. And at that particular point, just before he begins the symphony, he actually gets very, very seriously ill. In fact, he has an intestinal haemorrhage which almost kills him. And his doctor says to him, "You were on the brink of death. You've just pulled through. You are a very lucky man." Now, bear that in mind when we start to listen to the symphony.

So this is somebody who's had a near death experience, who himself in his earlier symphonies, particularly as we saw in symphony two, explores the nature of life and death in his deep existential questions, who now for the first time is facing death himself and shortly thereafter begins to compose the fifth symphony. And he also, of course, at the same time as he does this, says something else which is particularly interesting. He says, he writes that his own illness has been caused in large part by the strains of conducting the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, many of whose members had a deep seated difference of opinion in matters of musical interpretation. And so he found that extraordinarily difficult.

And he said, "Having to withstand endless attacks about my Jewish identity, and therefore attacks which were ultimately antisemitic, both from musicians and from a sustained anti-Semitic press." And he starts writing the symphony under those conditions. Now, I want you, we are going to play the first extract in a moment of the opening bars of Mahler's fifth symphony. Were we in a room together, which of course is so much, somebody who's talked his whole life, it's so much easier to teach. I would all ask you one question, but I'll ask you and many of you'll probably know the answer because one of the things that I've been struck by in this exchange is just with one lecture of Mahler, how many Mahlerians are are listening and how many know a lot more about Mahler than I do. And I find that fantastic, the exchanges that we've had. But here's the the point. The opening bars, a single trumpet.

Recall the opening bars of Beethoven's fifth symphony. And you remember that the opening bars... Those bars reflect the knocking of fate, we are told. Well, it is about fate that the fifth symphony engages. Now, there's one other little aspect I should mention before we continue. And that is that in the opening bars of the first symphony, the key which Mahler chooses is C

sharp minor. Those of you who are musically inclined will know that is a key unusual, very unusual to begin a symphony in this fashion other than say the Beethoven five. But it's also a key, which is the key of lachrymose mood, sadness, lamentation, a sense of serious threat. And you'll hear this in the first few bars.

Then when you've heard this extraordinary moment of the trumpeter, single trumpeter, think of that, have you got to start the symphony with one trumpet, the pressure on that poor person. And then we move into a few normal. Now, remember that Mahler lost eight siblings. And what is interesting, if you look at photographs, all of them were buried, all of them were buried in the Jewish cemetery. And there you can, there's still photographs of their tombstones. So Mahler would've gone to many Jewish funerals.

And the funeral march, which were centuries of march of you could say the Cortez moving along into the cemetery. There is unquestionably a Jewish sense to the sadness, to the pathos, which is absolutely central to the music. So Shawna, if we can have the first of our clips, which is the opening bars of the Mahler fifth symphony.

An audio clip of Mahler's fifth symphony plays

Thank you, I didn't need to go that far, but you can get what I'm getting at is the beginning of that symphony, there's trumpet sounds, the single bugle trumpet. You may want to even suggest as some have done sound of Chauffer, which Mahler would've known well. The call to attention. And then that unbelievably sad, saturated in sadness, concerto movement as it moves into the funeral march, which is truly breathtakingly sad.

And this is a man composing this movement having just suffered a near death experience and pondering his own death because he had already suffered the loss of so many siblings. And the process of a funeral march sadly moving through. And of course, the homage to Beethoven in the first three blasts of the trumpet, which I suspect you would now recognise. The symphony then moves on, and it moves on to the rest of that movement and the second movement, which are absolutely, incredibly reflective of death, of despair, of a world in which he cannot find his way out for some level of optimism.

And I'm not, if I played the whole of it for you, you'd understand. Well, those of you who know the fifth will know that as well as I do. And then the most extraordinary thing happens. All of a sudden, towards the end of the second movement, we hear the following. We hear a call from the trumpets, not in our C sharp minor, but in D major, the heralded key, the home key of the symphony, which indicates, as it were, that all will be well, that this will end in triumph. But observe what happens as it starts in this three minute clip that I'm going to play for you now. It is quite the most incredible thing.

We've gone through this unbelievable depression. We all have in the process of our vacillating moods under the COVID-19. We have similar situation as so much of the first part of the second

movement of the symphony. And then comes the following. Now we will hear the second clip.

An audio clip of Mahler's fifth symphony plays

Okay, Shawna, that's fine. By the way, I hope you noticed that's a very fine conductor, Anders Nielsen, who's a very great Mahlerian, who's the Boston Symphony chief conductor. So if you ever see a Mahler concert with him conducting, well worthwhile, but you'll see what it just takes out of a conductor in that short clip.

So there you have it, this extraordinary corral, and you think we're home, we've resolved the crisis. We're beyond COVID-19, we're beyond the pandemic, we're beyond all our worries, and it's a magnificent corral in D major. And then all of a sudden the music collapses again because we are not home yet. We can't be, there's too much of a journey still to go through. There's too much reflection, there's too much pain, and the symphony continues in that particular fashion. But, and you know, you know one thing when you hear that, that it will come back, it has to come back.

You can't do that in a symphony and then allow it to collapse in that major key and then forget all about it. Although we will see that that does happen in the next one we're going to talk about, the sixth symphony, but not in this one. And so that movement does end and the music subsides, first into anxiety and then into despair. And then comes the third movement. Now unfortunately, time doesn't allow me to play you matter of that 'cause I've got quite a bit to get through in the hour that we have together, and I'm almost halfway through that already. So I want to come to the third movement, but I would invite you to listen to it in your own leisure and to see this extraordinary prestige of which is a folk music, and Viennese waltzes.

Strauss would be quite proud. Viennese waltzes all mixed up together, but there's a distorted quality to this. So Mahler is reflecting on his life in Vienna and he's reflecting on the culture of Vienna and he's reflecting on the culture of of Austria. He's looking at his life and he's thinking to himself, this is the life in which I am embroiled, and I'm not sure I really like that life. Of course, it's where my talent is. But the music has a distorted quality, all of it does.

Now, when you think about the fact that he wrote the symphony at a time when he had decided that he had enough of the Vienna Philharmonic and he had resigned his post there because he was so fed up with the resistance that he was getting from the musicians and the antisemitism that he was receiving at the hands of the press, you can well understand why he would've portrayed in a reflective moment his own life, 'cause as I said, it's always his life is there in some way, and we get a situation in that particular movement where, again, I can't tell you that the particular music has intrinsic meaning to it, but I can tell you that if you listen to it, there's no question that the composer is trying to tell you something about the life in which he leads and his reflection thereon.

And again, as I say, whilst the first movement, I have no doubt has some Jewish accent, by the

time it comes to the third movement, you can well see the frustration of that which is built up in him thanks to what has occurred to him in Vienna. Now at this particular point, a strange thing happens. A remarkable thing happens. It's 1901, I said to you that's when the symphony started. And in late 1901 when Mahler was sort of into that third movement, he went to a dinner party. And it was on the 7th of November, 1901.

So the symphony was not completed yet, and the dinner party changed his entire life because seated opposite to him at the dinner party was a young woman of spectacular beauty, and I might add considerable self-assurance. She was about 16 years younger than him. She was a composer in her own right and she certainly didn't lack confidence, and her name was Alma Schindler. And she had been studying composition with a well-known musician called Alexander Vilensky.

And after dinner, Mahler and and Alma Schindler got into a heated argument about that ballet score that Vilensky had submitted to Mahler for possible production. Mahler had did not like the the particular score and he hadn't replied to it. And she certainly found this firstly unbelievably unacceptable. There were rumours that she'd had an affair with Vilensky, but be that as it may. But he by the end of the evening had decided this was the woman for him. This was the woman whose, her wit, the disposition, her beauty, all such, that she was going to be his wife. And as a result of which, Mahler then, by the 27th of November, three weeks later, less than three weeks later, he was already talking of marriage. And almost against her will, Alma Mahler said, "I realised he's the only man who can give meaning to my life, for he far surpasses all the men I've ever met."

The oddest thing about it was that of course that wasn't entirely true. Life went on because as I've indicated to you, she of course, whilst Mahler was married to her, had a really kind of passionate affair, and then married Walter Grokist, the founder of the Buckhouse Architecture School, and then later France Verfel, who was a very famous Austrian writer. She certainly attracted incredible men. But that's for another time and another occasion. What is particularly important about this is that suddenly in the middle of the symphony he has met Alma. And I might add the other thing about her, which was particularly interesting. She wasn't exactly prosemitic, she was antisemitic, which of course is a problem certainly commented on by many of the commentators, something which itself is rather odd.

But nonetheless, by December 9, when Mahler went back to conduct in Berlin, she had made up her mind and he too, and by Christmas they were engaged. I mentioned this all to you 'cause he's in the middle of writing the symphony that we're analysing. And the next thing that we get in our discussion of the Mahler five is the famous adagietto. Now the adagietto was made famous by the film. Some of you like me who are old will remember Visconti's Death in Venice, the film which basically was based on the book by Thomas Mun. But the interesting thing about the book, of course, the book talks about a writer who comes to Venice. The film is about a composer, Gustav VonAccunberg, a composer, and is played by Dirk Bogard, who at one stage as I understand was a sort of matinee idol, but probably his greatest role. And basically he's

dressed to look like Mahler.

I'm not quite sure why that was, but save for this, that what was extraordinary about Death in Venice, and you all know this, was it made the adagietto particularly famous because it was the music score for that film made in 1971. And there's a funny anecdote about that, because when the film was made and they put the Mahler adagietto to the film score, the filmmakers said, "Who's this guy who wrote this? This is fantastic, can't we get him for other films?" And of course, it was Mahler who was long dead, but it made the adagietto very famous on its own, and it's given an rise to incredible controversy in music 'cause the adagietto has been interpreted in two very diametrically opposed ways. Leonard Bernstein, who of course as I've indicated, was an absolute central to the revival of Mahler in the 1960s.

And I did give to Judy the actual clip of the famous recording or visit of Leonard Bernstein to Israel in 1967 after the Six Day War and the unification of Yu Shaoli when he played the Mahler second. And if you haven't seen it, you could get it from her. It's a fantastic just six, seven minutes of very interesting. Bernstein, who was the major sort of architect behind the revival of Mahler. He played the adagietto on two very celebrated occasions, the death of Serge Krishovitski, who was the Berlin Philharmonic, sorry, Berlin, the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, sorry, Boston Symphony Orchestra's chief conductor until 1951 when he died.

Very, very central figure in the music life of Bernstein. And then he played it even more famously at the funeral of Robert Kennedy in 1968. So there was, there is a view that will, this is a music of immense sadness. There is, however, the controversy and the view that I think most people accept now, that this adagietto is actually a love letter to Alma. Now that's why I've mentioned the background here again, that in the middle of the symphony, Alma comes into the picture. And we know this because Mingledurg, who is the famous Dutch conductor and extremely famous, sorry, extremely friendly with the Mahlers, he was the one who pointed this out, who said, "Actually what the adagietto is, it's a love letter which Mahler sent to Alma."

And Mingleburg pointed out that it was accompanied by a short note, a short poem to Alma written by Mahler, which said, obviously it was written in German, but the English translation is, "How much I love you, my sun, I cannot leave you. I cannot tell you," sorry, "I cannot tell you that with words. I can only lament to you my longing and love." My handwriting's so shocking that I couldn't read it, so let me read that again. "Is how much I love you, my sun," S-U-N not S-O-N. "I cannot tell you that with words. I can only lament you my longing and love." And she then was reported as saying, "You must now come." And it was, and effectively, therefore, most people today think that the adagietto is actually Mahler, a man of few words but of great music, it's his love letter to Alma who he was about to marry and whom he had met halfway through the composition of the symphony.

And it is particularly interesting if you think it through, that having gone through the near death experience and examining the complexities of those feelings of mortality in the first and the second movement, and thinking I could get out of that with that extraordinary corral that I played

for you, which essentially then collapses into despair. And then in a way a whole movement devoted to, as it were, his conflicting feelings about Vienna, where he was the central music figure. Then he meets Alma and suddenly he experiences love of a particular kind that he cannot express otherwise in music. And I think most of the musicologists would say that Bernstein was wrong to see the adagietto as something which was funereal. Rather, it's a love letter in music.

And of course then, you know, just like Tom Woodic scholars, there's a whole debate about how long the adagietto should be. So apparently Mingleburg and Mahler himself played it at seven minutes and the longest, and then you've got Heintzinch at 13 and a half minutes. And of course there's a debate about that. I'm not going to bore you with that. But what is interesting about it is when you listen, and I'm going to play you a clip from Simon Rattle, that very great conductor who plays it roughly, by the way, 9 and a half, 10 minutes, and Simon Rattle, which I think really captures it beautifully.

But what is extraordinary about it is its simplicity. It's a harp in the strings. And what is this, there's an ambiguity in it because it sort of hovers between, it's supposed to be in F major, but sort of between an A and a C, and the F is sort of there in an ambiguous form, but it's simplicity is such that it creates this mystique about it. But when you listen just as three minutes, it's like the music is almost endless. It just strings out almost quite infinitely, with infinite love. Not necessarily a sexual love as such, but an existential love which Mahler felt for Alma. And perhaps, you know, everyone in the room might wonder what would they do if they got a love letter in this particular way. So if we could now play the third of our clips, well, that'd be great.

An audio clip of Mahler's adagietto plays

Thanks Shawna.

Oh, I don't know about you but it's just, it's endless. It just seems to sort of stretch in an extraordinary way. And yet when you look at the construction of it, it's so simple, so simply musically. And so we finally come to, and it seems to, we've come to the final movement and the final movement, even from Frankurian who only came to conduct Mahler very late in life, probably for understandable reasons bearing in mind his Nazi heritage. But even Frankurian actually acknowledged that it is probably the most exhilarating, extraordinary finale of any symphony in the repertoire. I'm not going to do other than a short clip from a recording of Leonard Bernstein, which I'll come to in a moment. But you'll hear again that the corral comes back, that which I played for you from the second movement returns, and now we can come home.

Now we have found love, now we have found meaning in life. We've gone through all of the turmoils and troubles of life. And the symphony can now end in D major, in triumph, in resolution, in a sense that our hero or all of us have found sufficient meaning in life to negotiate our way through traumas and near death experiences and effectively found some resolution to

the dilemmas that we face. It is an extraordinarily moving symphony of an over an hour. And it comes to a conclusion which is particularly wonderful, and I'm just going to play for you the first little bit from the corral and its surrounding part of the last part of the Mahler fifth symphony.

An audio clip of Mahler's fifth symphony plays

Well, I think everybody wants to stand up. That was Leonard Bernstein. By the way, and what I think is maybe many people regard as perhaps the definitive recording of the fifth symphony with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in 1987. A remarkable recording. If you can also get the famous one by Brunei Volta, who was of course a mentee and an assistant conductor to Mahler. It's rerecorded in the CD now in 1947, another extraordinary recording. Well, I've realised I've gone way over time on the fifth, so I'm going to be very brief since it's late for us here, I suppose. And let me give you 10 minutes on the sixth.

So this pose is really, I suppose I should did only other way around because the sixth is called the tragic symphony. Now this is weird for the following reason. Mahler was at the top of his game. He had married Alma, the woman of his dreams. He had this beautiful child, Maria, and another one who arrived, two children. He was now the director of the Vienna Opera and the most important musical position perhaps in the musical world. There was nothing in his life at that particular point in time which essentially indicated a measure of despair.

There was nothing in his life would suggest that he would want to write a symphony which was so tragic by nature. So the question is, why write something, which to a large extent, as I shall indicate by two short clips, is so desperate? And I think the answer to that is because Mahler did, in a moment of happiness, he was also able to reflect, reflect on what was to come. So whilst the first symphony was one of triumph, we have come home. When you hear that end, you feel I'm home, I have come home to a more happy, decent place.

But now that you're there and you've got time to think about it, Mahler writes a symphony from a position of extraordinary security, the most happy time in his entire life. And there he is, he goes to this hut where he composes on Lake Worth and it's a happy family time. And he writes a symphony which Alma does not want him to write. I'll come to that in a moment. But it's a symphony which foreshadows, foreshadows as it were, what is going to happen the 20th century. Mahler seemed, like so many great artists, could seem to understand that the certainties and veracities of the later part of the 19th century, early part of 20th century were about to end and horror was about to ensue.

And it's interesting, Albert Cameau, the great novelist, said about this, "When I describe what a catastrophe of man looks like, music comes to mind, the music of Gustav Mahler." And so there is a sense about that, about the sixth. And Mahler himself said, "My sixth symphony will contain profound riddles, the solution of which may only be attempted by a generation which has absorbed and truly digested my first five symphonies." He himself acknowledged the enigma of it. But there is one thing that is certain about the symphony, which I wanted to share with you,

which is that when he ended the symphony, Klemperer, who is his again one of his assistant conductors, and I want to say something about Klemperer as soon as I finished this, Klemperer said that Mahler and Alma were beside themselves, particularly Mahler, that when he finished conducting the first performance of the sixth symphony, he was sobbing.

He was absolutely sobbing, he was uncontrolled sadness and emotion, and Alma said, "It was a symphony that more than any other reflected the core of my husband." It was a real sense in which this was a symphony more than any other. And it's a symphony which does reflect terrible trouble. So let's just have a look at the beginning of the sixth symphony and you'll see exactly what I mean. Now, what is interesting about it, and just let me make this point, is that the thing about Mahler's music that makes it so remarkable is the contradictions in the symphony.

So here we get an opening very different to the fifth, because although it's a march, just think of what kind of march it is and think about the horrors of what's going to happen in the 20th century when you think about that march. And then it flips to what's called the famous Alma theme in which Mahler himself suggested, following from the adagietto, that he wanted to capture the character of his wife. So within four minutes, such as I think, all I'm going to give you the clip of four minutes, you will see these two kind of components of Mahler, this desperate, awful, threatening music, and then transmogrifying into this contradiction, which essentially lies at the heart of the symphony by which he cannot now resolve for a reason I'll come to. But let me first play the penultimate, the fifth clip, the opening of the sixth symphony, the tragic symphony.

An audio clip of Mahler's sixth symphony plays

So there you have this extraordinary juxtaposition between this thumping, marching, kind of very threatening. Could it be that Mahler foresaw the first world war and what is to come beyond, the marching of soldiers, desperate, threatening music, which is unbelievably threatening. In A minor, by the way. And then you get this juxtaposition of the famous Alma theme, I'm not quite sure listening to this whether Alma would've been pleased or not pleased by it. But badly he was trying to reflect a personality of the juxtaposition. But at the end of the movement comes back to this marching, this desperate marching. And then there's a great debate in the musicologists between the second and the third movements of which one should come first. I'm not going to go into that 'cause I'm running out of time.

But it is true that the traditionally the third movement, what you see is apparently children playing and falling down. And there's a significant suggestion that these were Mahler's own children. And of course, Mahler did suffer the death of his daughter at a very, very young age. And Alma was distinctly disturbed about this music. This was a falling out between her and Mahler 'cause of the fact that it wasn't just a question of the macro, the broad concept of despair, but there was something deeply personal about this when you got to that movement, and it was a movement almost reflecting of children, children playing, children playing unsteadily, and then children falling down.

We then come to the final movement, which is the fourth, the fourth movement. And this is what is particularly interesting. There were initially what they called three hammer blows. I'll play you one of them. Mahler decided this wasn't going to be an instrument itself, it was in the orchestra. So many people use very different things, a huge hammer pipe with a box, something to make an extraordinary thumping sound. And there were initially three of them. And the reason that was almost suggesting of Mahler foreshadowing the three great tragedies that were going to happen in his life, which were firstly the death of his daughter, the loss of his job, because he was kicked out as a director of the Vienna Opera, and finally his own death.

He took the third of those out. Some people suggest he foreshadowed his death and he wanted to take it out, so there were only two hammer blows. And the idea is that it's really, what the music is telling us is that our hero who goes through this ambiguity of this despair which he foresees, and then the love, the Alma theme, and in a sense the potential problems with these children, finally gets into the final movement. And what is extraordinary about that movement is you're not sure if it's going to end in A minor or A major, that is a triumphant key. Is it going to end in triumph or is it going to end in despair?

And then there are these two hammer blows, this massive sort of sound which is made almost by a hammer, not by an instrument within the orchestra. And as our hero, after the first one, staggers up again trying to recover, trying to continue his life. And he's knocked down by the second blow, which ultimately means that the symphony ends in complete tragedy. And we will just, I'll just play for you a little clip, which has one of the famous, famous hammer blows before we end our evening.

An audio clip of Mahler's sixth symphony plays

Well, that's one of the hammer blows. You could see the instrument that was being employed there. So, and there were two of those. There were initially three, and the music ends not in any triumph, but in despair.

Let me end just with two final points. I think that there's a broader issue here, which goes back to the theme of so many of the lectures in which we are started off this evening, which is the question of the alienated Jew who maybe in many ways sees the world in a particular way. And the question about it that, as I said, the fact that Mahler thought that as a Jew, he was an outsider throughout the world, that in a sense, even in that fifth symphony, you can hear those accents clearly, the melancholia of Jewish history and broader history that he foresaw. The tragedies that were to come not just only to himself but in a broader sense.

And in that sense, although the music speaks for itself, it also speaks beyond, it speaks to us today. It speaks about hope and tragedy and pathos and threat and possibly hope again. There's one other aspect which I think is quite interesting, which of course is this issue of Judaism and Mahler. And it's interesting that Klemperer, who the great conductor and was Jewish, converted to Christianity and then returned to Judaism. And he was asked by Daniel

Barumbum, whom he was quite close, why he had done that. And he said, "I converted to Christianity 'cause I wanted to conduct Bach's and Matthew's passion and I didn't think I could do that as a Jew." And then Barumbum said, "Why did you reconvert back to Judaism?"

He said, "'Cause it really wasn't necessary to convert to Christianity for that." And it did seem to me that when you think about that particular remark, extraordinary as that is, that Mahler himself never quite, as it were, can be interpreted without understanding this particular background of his, that there's no doubt that when you look at these two symphonies, place them together, extraordinary notion of the personal and the political all come together. And perhaps let me leave you with this, that I do think that when you listen to the adagietto, he may well have been right, that it is that notion of love, of affection for each other and for somebody that you truly love that gets you through to that moment of triumph.

And perhaps with that, let me say, thank you for to all of you for listening. One final point, if you're interested in the sixth symphony and you want to listen to it, the two recordings I think are absolutely fabulous. There's an elder recording by John Barberelli, who is a very under-related conductor conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, and the great Claudia Abada. All of these Mahlers are brilliant, all of them on YouTube with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra, and they're absolutely fantastic. But there is an remarkable recording that he did with the Berlin Philharmonic on the sixth, well worth listening to if you can get ahold of a copy. Wendy, thank you very much.

- Thank you Dennis, that was absolutely outstanding, so insightful, and what can we say? History repeats itself. I have to say, thank you, and we look forward to hearing from you again soon. Thank you from all of us, thank you. Nice night everybody, thank you.

- Take care!