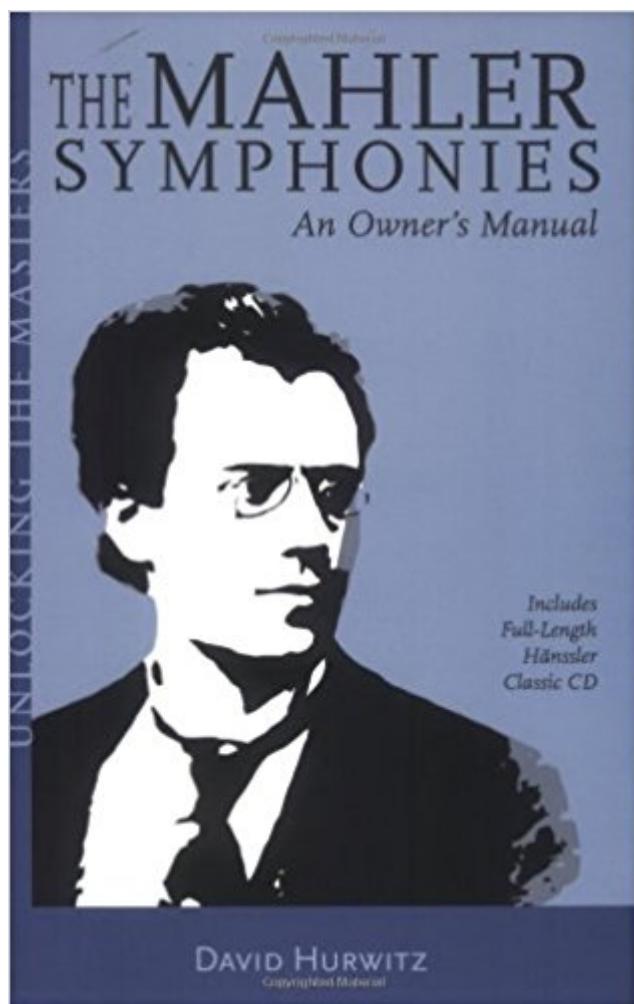


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# The Mahler Symphonies: An Owner's Manual (includes 1 CD)



## Synopsis

(Unlocking the Masters). Since Gustav Mahler was rediscovered in the early 1960s, his symphonies have become arguably the most popular works in the modern orchestral repertoire. Mahler's Symphonies: An Owner's Manual is the first discussion of the ten completed symphonies (No. 1-9 plus "The Song of the Earth") to offer music lovers and record collectors a comprehensive overview of the music itself, what it sounds like, how it is organized, its form, content, and meaning, as it strikes today's listeners. The book caters to the novice as David Hurwitz describes what the listener will hear, section by section, using simple cues such as important instrumental solos, recognizable tunes, climaxes, and other easily audible musical facts. He explains how each work is arranged, how the various parts relate to each other, and how one work leads to the next. It describes the emotional extravagance that lies at the root of Mahler's popularity, the consistency of his symphonic thinking, the relationship of each work to its companions, and his dazzling and revolutionary use of orchestral instruments to create an expressive musical language that is varied in content and immediate in impact. The accompanying CD contains recordings from Symphony No. 1, Third Movement; Symphony No. 2, First Movement; Symphony No. 5, Third Movement ; and Symphony No. 7, Second Movement : "Nachtmusik I."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Anyone fascinated but daunted by Mahler's monumental, complex orchestral works will find this

book a welcome guide. Focusing on the nine completed symphonies and *The Song of the Earth*, David Hurwitz addresses his readers directly in an informal, conversational tone. Aided by a CD of four selected movements, he tells them what to listen for, what to pay special attention to, and, pointing out some recurring characteristics, what to remember for future reference. He explains Mahler's concept of form and structure, from the smallest motives to the over-life-size finished edifice. He discusses Mahler's manifold use of his songs, his love for quoting from himself and for recalling and anticipating thematic material--always in a new guise--and his penchant for aborted climaxes and deceptive endings: part of his reluctance (or inability) to conclude a composition. Despite his originality, Mahler stood on the shoulders of other giants, notably Wagner and Verdi, whose works he conducted at the Vienna Opera. Hurwitz devotes much attention--and an entire appendix--to Mahler's unsurpassed mastery of orchestration, his skill in exploiting every instrument's resources, even using them for thematic purposes. Hurwitz admits that describing music in words has limitations; he falls back instead on describing Mahler's complex mixture of elements from the most sublime to the raw (for example, we find the music characterized as pretty, "cute," "sleazy," "sexy," "vulgar," "flatulent," or "squealing" like a barmaid "after being pinched on the behind" and the like). On the other hand, he rejects the conventional assumption that there is a link between a composer's work and life experiences, isolating the music from the personality. This might be considered a drawback insofar as it neglects a crucial dimension (consider, for example, our knowledge that Mahler tried to outwit fate by interpolating *The Song of the Earth* between his Eighth and Ninth Symphonies and how this might enhance our understanding of those two dark, valedictory final works). Yet even such cavils cannot diminish the originality and thoughtfulness behind this illuminating book. --Edith Eisler

" . . . very useful." -- *La Scena Musicale*, Vol. 10, No. 7" . . . Hurwitz manages to explain [Mahler's] creative process in plain language . . ." -- *American Reference Books Annual*, 36th vol." . . . this is the ideal book for a would-be Mahlerite . . ." -- [musicweb-international.com](http://musicweb-international.com)"Hurwitz is precise, avuncular, and enthusiastic . . . Recommended." -- *Choice*, July/August 2005"The concise discussion of each movement, in its parts and themes is factual, simple . . ." -- [VocalImages.com](http://VocalImages.com)

I was initially rather disappointed in this book given the mostly great reviews. I even gave it three stars rather than 4. In catering to a more general audience, I thought it ended up being too vague and impressionistic for my taste. Lacking any references to specific measures or rehearsals in the score, I found it often hard to follow what exactly he was referring to. With the modern Internet, it is

easy to download free orchestral scores, and I saw no reason not to make some attempt to refer to the score in examining the music. I guess I was looking for something closer to Grove's "Beethoven and his 9 Symphonies". I ended up buying a used copy of the book "Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies" by Floros which seems to be much more specific. (A current paperback edition of Floros' book is available; though not at for some reason. only has an entry for the out of print editions.)The above is mostly what I originally wrote. On second thought, however, I think this book is a good complement to a more in depth work such as that of Floros mentioned above. I really would not want to discourage anyone from buying this book. And for anyone who is not really versed in reading music, this book would be a great guide.

Useful for all Mahler lovers.

David Hurwitz's THE MAHLER SYMPHONIES is aptly subtitled "An Owner's Manual." The book is intended for people who already know they like Mahler's music, and want to know more about it. Have you ever met a birder--one of those unusual people so devoted to the study of birds that they can look up into the trees and spot several different birds, where you and I would be lucky to see even one? Well, that's what Hurwitz is for Mahler devotees. He looks beyond a simple introduction to each symphony, and tells us what is going on--from the instruments involved, to the ideas or feelings being painted in sound. At first I thought it might be "kinda hokey" that the book comes with a CD inside the back cover. But bless his soul, Hurwitz was right to do it this way. Using the CD tracks, he points to things like "a sinister little tremolo (18:36)" that might have been overlooked without the CD accompaniment to illustrate the written word. What really delighted me were the tables at the end of the book's discussion of Mahler's symphonies. In these tables, Hurwitz categorizes the symphonies according to their content of: "Marches and Dances," "Screams, Crashes, and Thuds," "Appearances of the 'Aspiration' or 'Redemption' Theme" "Mahlerian Humor" "Large-scale Structure" If you are an admirer of Mahler's music, these tables will indicate to you that David Hurwitz "gets it"--he understands that Mahler's music is much more than sounds, or a simple concert performance by an orchestra. Mahler left behind the form-fitting rules of "Classical Music" because he had something bigger to say about life. David Hurwitz will help you appreciate Mahler even more than you already do!

Thoroughly enjoyable, informative And witty. Especially handy as a gift for a recent Mahler convert. A must have for the Mahler novice and connoisseur alike.

A good book but I preferred "Gustav Mahler The Symphonies".

Arrived on time. No problem.

the book which I needed to understand and further appreciate Gustavo Mahler's symphonies arrived in amazingly short notice ( a few days) and the book was in mint condition and surprisingly a CD was included in this copy. I am most pleased.

Sort of a play by play guide for each of Mahler's symphonies. Useful to have while listening if you want to get more out of your listening experience. Some background information is also provided, which is helpful.

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