

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK (born 1941)

I WILL LIFT UP MINE EYES

Composed: 1989–1998

Premiered: Norfolk, VA, 1998

I - I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes

II - How Long?

III - The Lord Is My Shepherd

Adolphus Hailstork was born in Rochester, New York; he grew up in Albany, and eventually studied at the University of Michigan, where his teachers included the celebrated composer David Diamond. Like Aaron Copland and so many others before him, he also studied with Nadia Boulanger.

Hailstork has always identified and engaged with his African-American heritage, both musical and cultural. *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes* has even been billed as a “spiritual for tenor solo, chorus and orchestra,” thought it is far more than that. Hailstork himself has explained that the three sections of the work actually define an arc from faith to doubt and back—“affirmed, lost and restored” as he puts it. While there are undeniable (and unmissable) echoes of the Spiritual tradition in the music, the long history of religious choral music from Bach to Honegger is just as important. The spirituals, after all, were not “only” religious music; they were encoded maps to freedom. The “sweet chariot” of *Swing Low* was the Great Dipper, the pointer to the North Star and freedom, while the spirituals’ otherwise curious obsession with the Jordan River covers a more prosaic recognition that the Susquehanna was the last major obstacle before Pennsylvania. All of this is territory covered in Hailstork’s opera *Rise to Freedom*, while a visit to the slave bases on the coast of Ghana led directly to the darkness of his Second Symphony.

Here, the “darkness” is the plight of the tenor soloist in *How Long?*—as real a “long dark night of the soul” as anything in Gesualdo, not at all brightened by the two pillars of religious affirmation on either side of it; indeed, the music almost seems despairing enough to attempt a Samson-like demolition of the whole edifice. This is a voyage into the abyss of the soul familiar to all, religious or otherwise; doubt is always an option—sometimes a necessity, in fact—but affirmation is the only way forward and upward. And that, ultimately, is the message of *I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes*.

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)

SYMPHONY No. 10

COMPOSED: 1910

PREMIERED: London, England, 1965

It would seem to be a fairly basic rule of adultery not to send your love letters to your lover's spouse, but that is exactly what the architect Walter Gropius did; he addressed a blazing hymn of illicit adoration to "Dr. Direktor Mahler" and mailed it without noticing anything amiss. He meant, to put it mildly, to write "*Frau* Dr. Direktor Mahler" on the envelope. Suddenly, Gustav Mahler found out why his wife Alma was so enthusiastic about those endless dinner parties at the Gropius place. Later, after poor Mahler had fretted and bawled himself into an early grave over her, Alma would marry Gropius; their daughter, Manon, would die young, inspiring Alban Berg's Violin Concerto. Meanwhile, Alma would salve her grief with a barely credible string of high-profile lovers over the next forty years, living just long enough to receive the dedication of one of Benjamin Britten's song cycles.

1910 was a bad year to be a married composer in Vienna. Just a few streets from the luckless Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg came home early to find his wife in bed with her painting teacher; meanwhile, Schoenberg's brother-in-law Alexander von Zemlinsky was laying frantic siege to the obviously very busy Alma Mahler, who, practical woman that she was, set her lover Gropius on him. It is therefore no wonder that Viennese music enters its emotionally chaotic "expressionist" period at this time; Mahler's Tenth Symphony would have been one of the highpoints of Expressionism if only Mahler had finished it.

Alas, the Tenth Symphony lay in fragments when Mahler succumbed to blood poisoning in 1910. An intensive period of treatment with Sigmund Freud had only left him more neurotic and miserable than ever, and even more incapable of coping with Alma's infidelity; it seems almost indecent to point out that yet another of her suitors was... Sigmund Freud, but the conflict of interest does not seem to have bothered either man.

Among Mahler's impressive catalog of neuroses was the belief that writing a tenth symphony would kill him. Beethoven, he believed, had set the benchmark at nine and promptly died. Bruckner believed this idiocy to the point of renumbering one of his symphonies No. 0 to avoid the dreaded ten (and then died anyway). Mahler called his actual Tenth Symphony *Das Lied von der Erde* to avoid the jinx, but the furies were obviously not listening; they carried him off when his actual Tenth symphony was barely fifty percent complete.

The most complete movement of the intended five is the opening Andante/Adagio, and it is this that we shall hear this evening, in the completion by the English musicologist Deryck Cooke. Earlier attempts to complete the movement fell victim to a succession of

weirdly Viennese emotional disasters: Ernst Krenek, Alma's son-in-law, Alexander Zemlinsky (her would-be lover) and Arnold Schoenberg all either attempted a completion, or, in Schoenberg's case, turned down the request because of a numerical obsessive neurosis that made Mahler's look sensible—he somehow worked out that the real number of the Symphony was actually 13, which is even worse than 10, apparently.

Mahler's manuscript is covered in shrieks of verbal agony in Mahler's atrocious handwriting—*To live for you!! To die for you!! Almschi!!!!*—that leave little room for doubt as to what (or rather, who) was on the composer's mind. The mood of the Adagio is relentlessly doom-laden, only raising its head for a quite sob when the second subject appears, and it is this theme that receives most of the composer's attention, building up to a celebrated highly dissonant chord before slipping back into its accustomed misery.

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813–1901)

STABAT MATER* from *Quattro Pezzi Sacri

COMPOSED: 1896–1897

PREMIERED: Paris, France, 1898

Contrary to popular belief, Verdi's last works were not the operas *Otello* and *Falstaff*, but a collection of four sacred works, of which the *Stabat Mater* is the largest; the others were the *Ave Maria*, a *Te Deum* and the *Laudi alla Vergine Maria*—all reflecting, perhaps, the aging Verdi turning to the faith of his youth for comfort in what were, for him, harrowing times. The rising political tensions in Italy during the late 1890s culminated in the assassination of King Umberto I in 1900, which many have seen as the immediate cause of the stroke that scythed down Verdi when he heard the news. Whatever the truth of this, Verdi was not a happy man in his last years.

The thirteenth-century Latin sequence *Stabat mater* (“The mother stood”) describes the scene at the foot of the Cross, with special reference to Mary, the despairing Mother of Jesus. Just as he had done with the Requiem Mass, Verdi essentially turns this into a quasi-operatic *scena*, though he will have been aware that composers like Carissimi had done very much the same some three hundred years earlier. There is an unmistakably medieval feel to the opening, with the chorus's unisons supported by bare open fifths in the orchestra, creating an atmosphere of desolation bleaker than in any of Verdi's operas. When Jesus expires—*ernisit spiritum* (He gave up his spirit)—a downward chain of chords evokes the spirit's slither into the underworld with a literalness unmatched since Monteverdi. However, the glimpse of Heaven at *Paradisi gloria* (The glory of Paradise) is an unmistakably modern, late Romantic glimpse of the brighter side of the Beyond, written by a man who clearly believed—or hoped—he would soon be encountering the real thing. The words here are, after all, a plea for the sinner redeemed through the

intercession of the Virgin Mary. Verdi, with his colorful love life and a lifetime of dubious business and political entanglements, felt he had much to be redeemed from.

The relentless, very medieval meter of the Latin verse gave Verdi as much trouble to set as it did many other composers. The original sequences were the first rhyming European poems, and were laid out in the earliest accent-based meters, probably drawn from folksong. While this made them far easier to remember than the drifting prose of earlier sacred literature (and ease of memorization was an important factor in their invention), it traps the composer inside a verbal stress pattern every bit as restrictive and unforgiving as *Hiawatha*. Bad composers have always dealt with this problem by pretending that the meter isn't there, or chop the sequence into autonomous fragments, which betrays the poem's continuity; great ones (and Verdi is certainly that) build the meter into the broad sweep of their own music. Verdi's setting shows, not all that surprisingly, that he could have shown his Baroque compatriots a thing or two.