GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)

Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth)

1. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde
   (The Drinking Song of the Earth’s Sorrow)  
   9:00

2. Der Einsame im Herbst
   (Autumn Loneliness)  
   9:47

3. Von der Jugend
   (Youth)  
   3:40

4. Von der Schönheit
   (Beauty)  
   7:46

5. Der Trunkene im Frühling
   (Wine in Spring)  
   5:06

6. Der Abschied
   (The Farewell)  
   30:30

St. Luke’s Chamber Ensemble  
George Manahan, conductor  
Jennifer Johnson Cano, mezzo-soprano  
Paul Groves, tenor
learned from the doctor that he, too, had a heart lesion and would live under a medical sentence of early death. The next summer he began to sketch some settings from a collection of 83 Chinese poems in a German rendering by Hans Bethge. The book The Chinese Flute, a collection of poems already a thousand years old, had been a gift from Theobald Pollak. Mahler turned to it at a moment when he was particularly aware of his own mortality, and found poems that spoke directly to his condition. He chose seven texts from Bethge's collection and set them as six movements (the last movement is a setting of two poems separated by a lengthy interlude).

The title "The Song of the Earth" is slightly misleading: there is no intimation that the earth itself is singing here; a fuller and more accurate title might have been "The Song of Life on This Earth," for the six movements deal with human beings and their actions and perceptions in a world where all is transient.

The individual may deal with the inevitable passing of all things by choosing to drink and forget, by swathing oneself in sadness, by recalling (or envying) the joys of youth, by concentrating on the doleful fact that even beauty passes away, by developing a particularly acute sensitivity to natural beauty, or by means of a poignant and nostalgic departure. All of these responses are to be found in the individual songs of the work, and sometimes in the same text.

As in the Ninth Symphony, which is the companion piece of Das Lied von der Erde, Mahler's textures are clear and transparently scored, but essentially polyphonic, with intertwining melodic lines that carry the music forward. The sound of the original score often suggests a chamber ensemble, but one of enormous size. This fact no doubt encouraged the idea of making a chamber version of the work for the Society for Private Musical Performances, which was organized after World War I, largely by Arnold Schoenberg and a circle of his students and friends to present carefully prepared performances of contemporary music before an audience of the society's members and their guests. No journalists were allowed to write reviews of the concerts. A number of orchestral works were reduced to the dimensions of a large piece of chamber music for this organization. This was, of course, a cost-cutting device, but it also demonstrated that modern works by composers such as Debussy did not require the full orchestra to convey their essence.

In the case of Das Lied von der Erde, the score contains a number of thematic kernels that Mahler used elsewhere for his expressive purposes—the assertive fourth, rising or falling (as at the opening, challenges the singer's mortality), the rising minor third, and—most eloquent of all—the descending second, a single downward step, which becomes utterly unforgettable in its yearning at the very end of the score. In addition, Mahler has sprinkled his score with the most delicate chinoiserie, pentatonic figures that recall the original Chinese poetry.

Mahler arranges the songs so that tenor and mezzo-soprano alternate throughout, the former generally having the more assertive music and moods, the latter having the most "internalized" expression.
1. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde (The Drinking Song of the Earth’s Sorrow)

A horn fanfare and an outburst of orchestral laughter set the scene in some drinking resort, where the wine flows freely to drive off nagging thoughts of impending death. The solo line, with this powerful orchestration, requires a Heldentenor of Wagnerian stamina. The singer furiously defies his grief and mortality with more wine, and still more wine. Only when the text turns briefly to the blue firmament and spring’s eternal renewal does Mahler allow him a moment of peace—but to no avail: “But thou, O man, how long livest thou?” Each stage of the opening song ends with the refrain “Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod” (“Life is only twilight, so is death”), each time appearing a semitone higher (G minor, A-flat minor, A minor) until achieving the home key.

2. Der Einsame im Herbst (Autumn Loneliness)

Autumn, of course, has always suggested not only the closing of the year but also the autumn of life. Over a gentle muted scale figure in the violins, the oboe sings its yearning melody, and the mezzo-soprano, in weary sustained lines, sings of the mists and the frosts. All is world-weary, longing for repose, though with enough energy left for a single outburst: “O love’s warm sunshine, have you gone for ever, and will my burning tears be never dried?”

3. Von der Jugend (Youth)

The poem depicts a scene of young people thoughtlessly enjoying their youth in a porcelain pavilion in the middle of a carp pond, a scene familiar from much Chinese art (and imitations thereof). It is a simple miniature, with the music of the opening stanza returning for the close.

4. Von der Schönheit (Beauty)

This, too, is a delicate translation into music of a scene familiar from Chinese painting: young women pick flowers on the riverbank, and a group of horsemen gallops past, inspiring a loving glance from one of the maidens.

5. Der Trunkene im Frühling (Wine in Spring)

The poem praises drinking for its own sake, to excess, and Mahler’s music suggests that the tenor has been taking his own advice: it begins in the home key of A, but the tenor’s entrance, just three short measures later, lurches into B-flat. The inspired orchestration is filled with special effects suggesting the consequences of this overindulgence, while the tenor is by turns assertive and sentimental, finally declaring his full intention of staying drunk.

6. Der Abschied (The Farewell)

The sixth and most profound of the songs in Das Lied von der Erde lasts nearly a half hour, as much as the previous five put together. Here, with the most delicate and restrained of orchestral treatments, Mahler intertwines thematic ideas that have been heard throughout the work. The text is filled with images of departure—the setting sun, the moon’s light, the sound of the brook at night, birds huddling for sleep, and the poet/singer longing to take a last farewell. All of this Mahler treats with the most exquisite delicacy—totally without sentimentality or dramatic posturing. An extended orchestral interlude functions as a quiet funeral march. As this builds to its climax and suddenly dies away, the final poem begins: a friend is saying farewell forever. It is not clear where he is going or why he has to go, but he must. In a hushed recitative over a sustained low C in the double basses, the singer sets the scene. The friend’s reply becomes warmer, more sustained, more richly accompanied by the orchestra until it blossoms into a softly shimmering C major with harps and violins as the singer evokes the endless rebirth of spring. Perhaps Mahler’s single most expressive stroke in the whole work is the final page for the mezzo-soprano, who four times repeats “Ewig...ewig...” (“Ever...ever.....”) with a two-note melodic figure that moves from E to D but never completes the final step to the closing C; only the instruments of the orchestra, representing the endless blossoming of nature, are able to bring that final repose.

For many years listeners and scholars accepted at face value the depiction of Mahler in Alma’s memoirs as a man who was obsessed with death, an emotional cripple. Yet any open-minded and open-hearted listening to Das Lied von der Erde forces us to challenge this view. The music is, without question, valedictory. But it is, in John Donne’s phrase, a “valediction forbidding mourning,” a farewell from one who loved life and celebrated it in music that reminds us all how very precious it is.

Steven Ledbetter © 2008
Schon winkt der Wein im goldnen Pokale,
Doch trinkt noch nicht, erst sing ich euch ein Lied!
Das Lied vom Kummer
Soll auflachend in die Seele euch klingen.
Wenn der Kummer naht,
Liegen wüst die Gärten der Seele,
Welkt hin und stirbt die Freude, der Gesang.
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod.

Das Firmament blaut ewig, und die Erde
Wird lange fest steh'n
Und aufblüh'n im Lenz.
Du aber, Mensch, wie lange lebst denn du?
Nicht hundert Jahre darfst du dich ergötzen
An all dem morschen Tande dieser Erde!

See dort hinab!
Im Mondmorgen auf den Gräbern
Hockt eine wild-gespenstische Gestalt.
Ein Aff ist's!
Hört ihr, wie sein Heulen
Hinausgellt in den süßen Duft des Lebens.

Herr dieses Hauses!
Dein Keller birgt die Fülle des goldenen Weins!
Hier diese Laute nenn' ich mein!
Die Laute schlagen und die Gläser leeren,
Das sind die Dinge, die zusammenpassen.
Ein voller Becher Weins zur rechten Zeit
Ist mehr wert als alle Reiche dieser Erde!
Dunkel ist das Leben, ist der Tod!

Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde
(The Drinking Song of the Earth's Sorrow)

Poem by Li Bai

The blue of heaven is unchanging,
And unchanging the earth rolls onward
And blossoms in spring.
But thou, O man, how long livest thou?
Why not one hundred years canst thou take pleasure
In all the rotten fruit of life's long vanity!

See there! Over there!
In the moonlight, in the churchyard,
Gibbers a ghost with evil in its shape.
It is a monkey!
Hear him, how his howling sounds strident
In our life's sweet scented morning.

So raise your cups!
The time has come, companions!
Empty your golden cups to the heel!
Life is only twilight, so is death!
Herbstnebel wallen bläulich überm See
Vom Reif bezogen stehen alle Gräser;
Man meint, ein Künstler habe Staub von Jade
Über die feinen Blüten ausgestreut.

Der süße Duft der Blumen ist verflogen;
Ein kalter Wind beugt ihre Stengel nieder.
Bald werden die verwelkten, gold'nen Blätter
Der Lotosblüten auf dem Wasser zieh'n.

Mein Herz ist müde. Meine kleine Lampe
Erlosch mit Knistern, es gemahnt mich
an den Schlaf.
Ich komm' zu dir, traute Ruhestätte!
Ja, gib mir Ruh, ich hab' Erquickung not!
Ich weine viel in meinem Einsamkeiten.
Der Herbst in meinen Herzen währt zu lange.
Sonne der Liebe, willst du nie mehr scheinen,
Und will my burning tears be never dried?

Mitten in dem kleinen Teiche
Steht ein Pavillon aus grünem
Und aus weißem Porzellan.
Wie der Rücken eines Tigers
Wölbt die Brücke sich aus Jade
Zu dem Pavillon hinüber.

In dem Häuschen sitzen Freunde,
Schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern,
Manche schreiben Verse nieder.
Ihre seidnen Ärmel gleiten
Rückwärts, ihre seidnen Mützen
Hocken lustig tief im Nacken.

Auf des kleinen Teiches stiller
Wasserfläche zeigt sich alles
Wunderlich im Spiegelbilde:
Alles auf dem Kopfe stehend
In dem Pavillon aus grünem
Und aus weißem Porzellan.
Wie ein Halbmond steht die Brücke,
Umgekehrt der Bogen. Freunde,
Schön gekleidet, trinken, plaudern.

In the water, on a little island
All of green and egg-shell china
Stands a dainty summer-house.
Like the tiger's back a-curling
Springs the arch of jade to cross it
To this summer-house of dreamland.
In the parlour friends are sitting,
Clad in silk, and drinking, chatting
Writing endless little verses.
How their silken sleeves are slipping,
How their silken caps sit perching
On those jolly heads a-wagging.
In the tiny, tiny patterns
Quiet, quiet pool of water
See the world reflected
marvellously in mirror image:
All those friends are topsy-turvy
In that world of egg-shell china,
In that dainty summer-house.
Like a sickle moon the bridge is,
Upside down its arches; while the friends
In silk and satin drink and chatter.
Junge Mädchen pflücken Blumen,
Pflücken Lotosblumen an dem Uferrande.
Zwischen Büschen und Blättern sitzen sie,
Sammeln Blüten in den Schoß und rufen
Sich einander Neckereien zu.

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
Spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Sonne spiegelt ihre schlanken Glieder,
Ihre süßen Augen wider,
Und der Zephir hebt mit Schmeichelkosen
Führt den Zauber
Ihrer Wohlgerüche durch die Luft.

O sieh, was tummeln sich für schöne Knaben
Dort an dem Uferrand auf mut'gen Rossen,
Weithin glänzend wie die Sonnenstrahlen;
Schon zwischen dem Geäst der grünen Weiden
Trabt das jungfrische Volk einher!

Das Roß des einen wiehert fröhlich auf,
Und scheut, und saust dahin,
Über Blumen, Gräser, wanKen hin die Hufe,
Sie zerstampfen jäh im Sturm die
hingesunk'nen Blüten,
Hei! Wie flattern im Taumel seine Mähnen,
Dampfen heiß die Nüstern!

Gold'ne Sonne webt um die Gestalten,
Spiegelt sie im blanken Wasser wider.
Und die schönste von den Jungfrau'n sendet
Lange Blicke ihm der Sehnsucht nach.
Ihre stolze Haltung ist nur Verstellung:
In den Funkeln ihrer großen Augen,
In dem Dunkel ihres heißen Blicks
Schwingt klagend noch die Erregung ihres
Herzens nach.

Von der Schönheit (Beauty)
Poem by Li Bai

The horse of one of them delighted
Wheels and neighs, curvetting round;
Over all the flowers trample heavy hoof-beats,
As they bruise in sudden storm
The tender hidden blossoms.
How their manes toss in tangled riot,
Breathing fire from steaming nostrils.

Golden sunshine weaves a web around them,
Mirrors all their laughing grace in water.
Sunshine mirrors all their slender beauty,
Mirrors their sweet eyes in water,
And the winds of spring with soft caresses
Waft on high their flowing silken sleeves,
Bear the magic of their pleasing odour
Through the air.

O, see, a company of lovely lads
Comes riding along the bank on prancing horses,
Shining far off like the sun at noonday;
See, through the leafy lanes of silvery willows
Trots that gallant young company!
Wenn nur ein Traum das Leben ist,
Warum denn Müh, und Plag’?
Ich trinke, bis ich nicht mehr kann,
Den ganzen, lieben Tag!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr trinken kann,
Weil Kehl’ und Seele voll,
So tauml’ ich bis zu meiner Tür
Und schlafe wundervoll!

Was hör’ ich beim Erwachen? Horch!
Ein Vogel singt im Baum.
Ich frag’ ihn, ob schon Frühling sei,
Mir ist als wie im Traum.

Der Vogel zwischtet: Ja!
Der Lenz ist da, sei kommen über Nacht!
Auf tiefstem Schauen lauscht’ ich auf,
Der Vogel singt und lacht!

Ich fülle mir den Becher neu
Und leer’ ihn bis zum Grund
Und singe, bis der Mond erglänzt
Am schwarzen Firmament!

Und wenn ich nicht mehr singen kann,
So schlaf’ ich wieder ein.
Was geht mich denn der Frühling an?
Laßt mich betrunken sein!

Der Trunkene im Frühling (Wine in Spring)
Poem by Li Bai
Die Sonne scheidet hinter dem Gebirge.
In alle Täler steigt der Abend nieder
Mit seinen Schatten, die voll Kühlung sind.
Ich spüre eines feinen Windes Weh'n
Hinter den dunklen Fichten!

Der Bach singt voller Wohlaut durch das Dunkel.
Die Blumen blühen im Dämmerschein.
Die Erde atmet voll von Ruh' und Schlaf.
Alle Sehnsucht will nun träumen.
Ich sehne mich, O Freund, an deiner Seite
Die Schönheit dieses Abends zu genießen.

Wo bleibst du? Du läßt mich lang allein!
Ich wandle auf und nieder mit meiner Laute
Auf Wegen, die von weichem Grase schwellen.
O Schönheit! O ewigen Lieben,
Lebens trunk'n! Welt!

Ich stieg vom Pferd und reichte ihm den Trunk
Des Abschieds dar.
Er fragte ihn, wohin er führe
Und auch warum es müßte sein.
Er sprach, seine Stimme war umflort:
Du, mein Freund,
Mir war auf dieser Welt das Glück nicht hold!

Wo art thou? I have been long alone!
I wander up and down and make my music
O'er pathways that are paved with tender grasses.
O Beauty! O life of endless loving,
Wild delirious world.

Es wehet kühl im Schatten meiner Fichten.
Ich stehe hier und harre meines Freundes.
Ich harre sein zum letzten Lebewohl!

The sun is setting out beyond the mountains.
And evening peace comes down in every valley
And shadows lengthen, bringing cool relief.
O see! Like some tall ship of silver sails,
Through heaven's blue sea.
I feel the stirring of some soft south-wind
Behind the darkling pine-wood!

The world now sleeps!

The stream sings as it wanders through the twilight.
As evening waxes the flowers grow pale.
The earth breathes gently, full of peace and sleep,
All our longings sleep at last.
Mankind, grown weary, turns homeward,
That in sleep, forgotten joy and youth
May recapture.

The air is cool within the pine-wood's shadow.
Here I stand and tarry for my friend.
I wait for him to bid the last farewell.

To share the heavenly beauty of this evening.
Where art thou? I have been long alone!
I wander up and down and make my music
O'er pathways that are paved with tender grasses.
O Beauty! O life of endless loving,
Wild delirious world.

He lighted down and proffered him the cup,
The parting cup.
He asked him wither he was faring
And questioned why, why it must needs be so.
He spoke, and his voice was veiled:
O my friend,
While I was in the world my lot was hard!
Where do I go? I go, I wander in the mountains.
I seek but rest, rest for my lonely heart!
I journey to my homeland, to my haven.
I shall no longer seek the far horizon.
My heart is still and waits for its deliverance!

The lovely earth, all, everywhere
Revives in spring and blooms anew!
All, everywhere and ever, ever,
Shines the blue horizon,
Ever... ever...!
St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble consists of 22 virtuoso artists dedicated to the mastery of a diverse repertoire spanning Baroque to contemporary. The Ensemble forms the artistic core of the Orchestra of St. Luke's (OSL), one of America's foremost ensembles. OSL was formed at Caramoor International Music Festival in the summer of 1979, after evolving from St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, which was established at The Church of St. Luke in the Fields in New York's Greenwich Village in 1974.

Dedicated to engaging audiences throughout New York City and beyond, OSL performs approximately 70 concerts each year—including an annual Chamber Music Series at The Morgan Library & Museum and Brooklyn Museum, an Orchestra Series at Carnegie Hall, and a summer residency at Caramoor International Music Festival. OSL's Principal Conductor is Pablo Heras-Casado. OSL collaborates regularly with the world's great artists, such as Renée Fleming, Yo-Yo Ma, Jessye Norman, Anna Netrebko, Anne-Sophie Mutter, Mark Morris Dance Group, Peter Gabriel, Sting, Elton John, and many more. In March 2011, OSL opened The DiMenna Center for Classical Music—it's first permanent home, and New York City's first rehearsal and recording facility dedicated to classical music. The Center has already hosted thousands of musicians from a wide range of ensembles and serves as the venue for OSL's free concert series OSL@DMC, which connects the public to the artistic process of composers and musicians.

Committed to community-building, OSL produces free concerts in each of the five boroughs as part of its Subway Series, and has engaged more than one million children in its Arts Education programs. OSL has commissioned more than 50 new works and performed more than 150 world, U.S., and New York City premieres. OSL's stellar 70+ discography includes four releases on its own label, St. Luke's Collection, and four Grammy Award-winning recordings.

More information at OSLmusic.org.

A 2011 Sara Tucker Study Grant Recipient, mezzo-soprano Jennifer Johnson Cano joined The Lindemann Young Artist Development Program at The Metropolitan Opera in 2008 and made her Met debut in 2009-2010. As First Prize winner of the 2009 Young Concert Artist International Auditions, she was awarded the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival and Princeton University Prizes and has given stunning recital debuts at Carnegie Hall, Merkin Hall and the Kennedy Center, and in Boston, Philadelphia, Houston, and Chicago.

In addition to her continued relationship with The Metropolitan Opera, Ms. Cano has appeared with such esteemed orchestras as the New York and Los Angeles Philharmonics and the Cleveland Orchestra. She toured with Musicians from Marlboro singing Respighi's Il Tramonto and Cuckson's Der gayst funem shture, recorded live and released by the Marlboro Recording Society. Ms. Cano has been part of the Ravinia Festival's Steans Institute and received a 2009 Sullivan Foundation Award.

Ms. Cano is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. She earned her bachelor's degree in Music from Webster University and her master's degree from Rice University.
Paul Groves began the 2010–2011 season with his debut at the Gran Teatre de Liceu in the role of Alwa in Gluck’s *Iphigénie en Tauride* at the Teatro Real Madrid and The Metropolitan Opera, as well as his debut as Qautiliero in the premiere of Vivaldi’s *Griselda* at Santa Fe Opera. Mr. Groves’ concert performances this season include a tour of Switzerland with Stravinsky’s *Oedipus rex*, Elgar’s *Dream of Gerontius* at Salisbury Cathedral with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Britten’s *War Requiem* at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome and the Teatro del Maggio Musicale in Florence, a return to the Edinburgh Festival with Schumann’s *Das Paradies und die Peri*, and Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* in Boston.

A winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in 1991 and a graduate of the company’s Young Artist Development Program, Mr. Groves made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 1992. His recent recordings include Roger Waters’ opera *Ça Ira* for Sony Classics, Ravel’s cantatas with Michel Plasson for EMI Classics, and songs by Duparc for the Naxos label. He has also recorded for the Telarc, Teldec, Philips, Deutsche Grammophon, and Decca labels.

Performers

Paul Groves, tenor

George Manahan, conductor
Jennifer Johnson Cano, mezzo-soprano
Paul Groves, tenor
Elizabeth Mann, flute
Stephen Taylor, oboe
Jon Manasse, clarinet
Marc Goldberg, bassoon
William Purvis, horn
Barry Centanni, percussion
Maya Gunji, percussion
Margaret Kampmeier, piano
Robert Wolinsky, harmolin
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