

Late Romantics - Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)



“The Scream” by Edvard Munch, 1893

Mahler wrote almost exclusively symphonies and songs, merged the two

- Orchestral accompaniments to Lieder (instead of piano)
- Lied tunes and/or texts used in Symphonies
- **Text Sources:**
 - Mahler wrote some poems of his own, set as Lieder, e.g. *Songs of a Wayfarer*
 - example: *Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld* (“going over the fields this morning”), becomes the main theme for 1st movement of **First Symphony**
 - ***Des Knaben Wunderhorn*** (The Youth’s Magic Horn): anthology of supposed folk poetry, published in early 19th century; used by Mahler as texts for songs.
 - Poems often have sense of alienation, stressing irony, uncertainty and brevity of life.
 - Mahler set texts as songs, then also used tunes in his 2nd-4th Symphonies, the so-called **Wunderhorn Symphonies**.
 - **Key relationships** in 2nd and 4th Symphonies: programs of both are introspection and redemption; both end on a key a 3rd higher than

beginning (2nd starts in C minor, ends E-flat Major): symbolic of death and resurrection; also homage to Wagner's concept of pitch change with programmatic/narrative implication

- **Other Text Sources:** emphasize unattainability, e.g. *Chinesisches Flöte* (Chinese Flute, 1907), collection of loosely-translated Chinese poems (tr. Hans Bethge). The themes are very romantic: world sorrow, forces of nature, alienation, loneliness, resolution through death
 - Mahler used these poems in *Das Lied von der Erde* (Song of the Earth 1908-9), an orchestral song cycle
 - Lots of pentatonic scale including minor pentatonic
 - Almost constant juxtaposition of major and minor throughout piece
 - Ending of Finale is important: will be copied by others. Harmony is static: tonic chord with added 2 and 6; singer repeats descending 3-2 pattern which never resolves to tonic; flute plays 3-5-6-7 repeatedly, ending with 3-5-6; this is text painting because text is "forever (ewig);" used as a way to portray eternity (ultimate endless melody).
- *Das Lied von der Erde* is a mix of romanticism and exoticism, but also shows signs of **expressionism** (culmination of Romantic movement?): art movement around WW I aimed at free expression of artist's emotional reactions, rather than representations of natural appearance of objects. Concentrates on dark emotions (alienation, irony, and more hysterical emotions than that). Analogy: things look worse at 4AM than by daylight. Example Munch's [The Scream](#)