

Gustav Mahler

by Nathan Shepard

About His Life- (1860-1911)

- Born into a large, German- speaking family in Kalischt, Bohemia on July 7, 1860
- He was a Jew.
- After grammar school at age 15, he enrolled in the conservatory.
- Graduated with honors in 1878
- Embarked on career as a operatic conductor in 1880
- After experience in small towns, he spent two years each in Kassel, Prague, and Leipzig.
- Spent three years in Budapest (1888-1891) and later, he was elected director of the Imperial Opera in Vienna, a position he held for six years- a very high honor.
- His years in Vienna were the peak of his career. He made popular and wiped out debt for the association he was working for.
- Married Alma Schindler in 1902
- Had only child, Anna Maria, in 1904
- Resigned in 1907 as a result of overwork and stress
- 1907- accepted position at the Metropolitan Opera and soon after accepted one at the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra in New York
- Had physical collapse in Feb. 1911: Never recovered
- Died in Vienna on May 18, 1911 at age 51

About His World View

- He was a Jew and faced discrimination in his early career.
- He respected life and feared death- based on things he grew up with- family deaths, a suicide, and a brutal rape he witnessed
- His uncertain feelings about life and fear of death is shown in his piece Kindertotenlieder, which means “Songs on the deaths of Children” which are about the loss of the innocent view of life.

About His Music

- His late romantic style reflected the uneasiness and restlessness around the turn of the century, and many do not feel comfortable listening to his detached, indecisive music.
- His heavy long pieces are similar to Wagner’s* heavy pieces, but Mahler’s music is more sharp and dynamic.
- Composed 9 symphonies- didn’t finish the 10th one
- He is the only composer since Beethoven to exceed 9 symphonies

*Wagner was a composer during and slightly before Mahler