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Classical?

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ISSUE'S
RECOMMENDATIONS



THE LEGACY OF
'GIANT STEPS'



THE HURDY-GURDY
THROUGH TIME

Curated by Holly Mia
Garside

Edited by Charlie
Moore

THE SEMIBREVE



The CBSO performs Mahler's Symphony no. 8 at Birmingham Symphony Hall © Andrew Fox

The Magic of Mahler's 8th.

Over a year ago, mere months before the first lockdown (wow that's gone by quickly), I was lucky enough to have performed Mahler Symphony No. 8 as part of the CBSO Youth Chorus, alongside the CBSO Chorus, CBSO Children's Chorus, University of Birmingham Voices, Baltimore Choral Arts Society and of course the CBSO itself. Conducted by the mesmerising Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, it was truly the peak of my experience as a musician thus far, and what I consider to be a turning point in my life in so many ways.

Trisa Sivavijayakumar of 9X shares my admiration for the symphony, stating: "Mahler's Symphony of a thousand is about the journey from earth to heaven. Something that touches me even though I have never experienced such a journey. I was lucky enough to perform it among the CBSO last year! I was not used to Mahler's works before performing it; however, now I can say that I am now a huge Mahler fan. My favourite bit of the symphony would have to be its climax with its magical use of percussion and brass. Mahler eight will always have a massive place in my heart. Miss Hawthorne also made an appearance as a soprano in the CBSO Chorus, and mentioned how privileged she felt to be able to sing with us in such an exciting performance of the symphony.

Musical fact

During a long orchestral performance, the tuning of the string section tends to drift flatter due to body heat expanding the instrument slightly, while the wind instruments get sharper: the longer the concert is, the harder it is to keep the orchestra completely in tune with each other!

I always knew that Mahler 8 had something special that separated it from other works of classical music, but only when researching for this article did I realise how extraordinary its story is.

The composition of this work, like so many great discoveries, was something that happened by complete chance. In 1906, Gustav Mahler retreated to his holiday home to revise the orchestration of his previous symphony, Symphony No. 7. At this time, Mahler was struggling with a dispiriting case of writer's block: he saw a barren musical future, simply not knowing what to write next. His wife recalls him to be "haunted by the spectre of failing inspiration". Then one day during this retreat, a sudden burst of creativity overcame Mahler, and he began to outline the musical architecture of a new piece, more ambitious than any of his former works. While speaking to music historian Richard Specht amid its composition, Mahler mentioned his eighth symphony, commenting "Just think: within the last three weeks I have completed the sketch of a completely new symphony, something that makes all my other works seem like preliminary efforts". Within two months, the work was complete.

It is clear that Mahler was spiritually inspired while composing this symphony, stating "On the threshold of my old workshop, the Spiritus Creator took hold of me and shook me and drove me on for the next eight weeks until my greatest work was done".

The true beauty of the symphony, however, comes with the music itself. The performance begins with a shocking fortissimo octave chord on the organ, laying the tonic of the key, shortly followed by the blanket of harmony played by the organ and then sang by the chorus. This fortissimo sound from the chorus is sung to "Veni, Veni creator spiritus", a motif that can be heard throughout the first part of this symphony. Blaring brass begins a marching-style rhythm, immediately signifying a very proud tone that echoes throughout the piece. This first part is set to a 9th-century Christian hymn, "Veni Creator Spiritus". It is a dramatic opening which takes form into a very dramatic first half. This part ends in a very epic style, clearly shown by the score here: all parts come together (including brass sat on a storey near the roof depending on the performance you hear!) to play the tonic chord. Truly a unifying and thrilling ending.

One strange thing about the form of this symphony is that it doesn't conform to the usual 4-movement form, instead consisting of only two parts. This was a conscious decision on Mahler's part, as very early notes concerning the piece hint at it being a four-movement symphony, but this idea was scrapped very early on in favour of the two-part form.

The second part of this piece, "Closing scene from Goethe's Faust", is very different from its former: overall

This image shows a page of a musical score for Mahler's Symphony No. 8. The tempo is marked 'Allegro Impetuoso'. The score includes parts for woodwinds (Bass Clarinet, Flutes, Oboes, Bassoons, Clarinets, Basses), strings (Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses), and vocal soloists (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). The vocal parts have lyrics in Latin: 'Veni, Veni creator spiritus'. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various dynamics and articulations.

more subdued and almost eerie to begin with. If you listen closely, you can hear echoes of the former part which ties the two pieces together. The beginning of part two completely juxtaposes the beginning of part one: pianissimo tremolos from the violins send shivers down your spine and the mystical soli from the woodwind add an otherworldly sense, reminding me personally of the magical tone of Holst's "The Planets" suite. Solis are passed around sections and each time resolving back into the humming tremolo of the violins. This calm quiet opening doesn't last long though, as the original motif played by the woodwind is repeated and followed by a subito fortissimo eruption of strings. The true emotion of this piece evolves from there until we get to what I believe to be the most incredibly emotional and climactic ending in classical music. Mahler himself believed his Eighth Symphony to be an expression of confidence in the eternal human spirit, and this ending truly displays the divine impact music can have on us.

I could talk more about the form of the music and what I think it might mean, but I don't believe I can encapsulate such a feeling into words. In the words of Hans Christian Anderson: "Where words fail, music speaks".

This image shows a page of a musical score for the chorus of Mahler's Symphony No. 8. The tempo is marked 'Allegro Impetuoso'. The score includes parts for a large chorus (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a full orchestra (Violins, Violas, Cellos, Double Basses, Brass, Percussion). The vocal parts have lyrics in Latin: 'Veni, Veni creator spiritus'. The score is written in a standard musical notation with various dynamics and articulations.

I could talk about this piece for hours because there's just so much to discuss! From how it shows a perfect blend of the romantic and 20th/21st century periods of music (marking the end of the former and beginning of the latter) to the emotional impact it has on the audience and players alike. Not surprisingly, this was the first musical work that Mahler composed that didn't receive any immediate, disappointing criticism: the uproarious applause from the audience lasted 20 minutes on its debut performance on 12th September 1910. The piece has come to be known as "Symphony of A Thousand" because it requires a whopping 1029 musicians to be performed: Mahler conceptualised this as a "new symphonic universe". For me, Mahler Symphony No. 8 is one of those very rare art forms that doesn't seem to ever become dull as there's always something new to notice upon every listen. If you're new to the world of classical music or are thinking of getting into the world of classical music, I would highly recommend this symphony as one, to begin with. It's everything I (and hopefully you) could ever want from a single symphony.

Holly Mia Garside
10 C

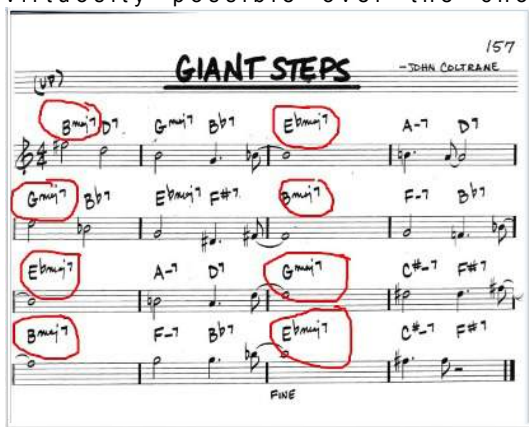
The Legacy of John Coltrane's Giant steps.

Jazz has become a genre of music defined by its difficulty both to play, and for many, to understand. If you listen to Jazz, you are sophisticated, fancy, and have high cultural capital, at least according to our 21st-century western society. The origins of Jazz, however, don't lend themselves to the level of sophistication jazz has today whatsoever. Liberated slaves playing tunes on decommissioned civil war instruments doesn't lend itself to the images we now have of Jazz bars and black-tie concerts. The exclusivity of jazz has to stem from the difficulty and complexity of rhythm and harmony, which went on to characterise Jazz music as a whole.



The Original Dixieland Jass Band – Subjects of the first Jazz recording.

In the February of 1960, Jazz Saxophonist John Coltrane released his fifth studio album, 'Giant Steps', with its opening and title track about to become one of the most well-known standards in American Jazz history. Taking up just half a page on the back of 'The Girl from Ipanema' in the sixth edition real book, Giant steps is not known for its melody. The striking quality of the lead sheet is the rate of harmonic rhythm. Two chord changes in every bar. The composition is simply marked 'Up(tempo)' in my copy of America's most controversial songbook, yet when Coltrane called the tempo at the start of the recording session for the record, it caught everyone off guard, most notably pianist Tommy Flanagan, who's stop-start solo is a demonstration of just how difficult the standard is to improvise over. It is often said that there was little rehearsal time before recording, and while the performers were certainly caught off guard by the fast tempo, Coltrane's lightning speed solo demonstrates the level of virtuosity possible over the chords.



'Giant Steps' by John Coltrane from 'The Real Book'

The Chord Pattern from Coltrane's piece, and its fast-moving bass line, are what gave the piece, and the album, their title. The opening phrase jumps between B, D, G, B \flat and E \flat , in a matter of seconds. The chord sequence became known as the Coltrane changes, and it has become a rite of passage for Jazz musicians to competently solo over the famous pattern.

Coltrane's 'Giant Steps' has become a staple in every Jazz musician's repertoire, and its difficulty set the bar for the virtuosity and exclusivity of Jazz musicians, and hence, Jazz fans. Jazz Trumpeter Louis Armstrong once said, "If you have to ask what Jazz is, you'll never know.", and I think our 21st-century society has deviated far from what Jazz is about. Jazz as a genre can polarise and alienate people, led by the snobbery of those who claim to understand it. Jazz should be a personal experience, where the music and the feelings it evokes don't spark feelings of inferiority or misunderstanding, rather an individual experience of emotion.

'Giant Steps' is a piece of music that pushed the boundaries of Jazz and managed to make its way into popular culture. The virtuosity required to perform it pushes musicians to new levels of skill and expression. Whilst difficult to understand or play, it sounds good. Duke Ellington said, "Music is an aural art; if it sounds good, it's good music.", and the one thing towering over the piece's difficulty is its wonderful sound. 'Giant Steps' is the perfect example of hard work paying off, and musicians around the world learn the changes, not for their difficulty, but because they sound good. Perhaps 'Giant Steps' was the start of the alienation of Jazz, but it helped pave the way for a new era of music which required skill to play and sounded good to listen to.

Charlie Moore
L3

Our Recommendations



Here is the link to [Holly's go-to recording of Mahler Symphony No. 8.](#)

'I think it's the perfect first piece to experience if you are looking to get into classical music.'



After hitting 3 million subscribers, YouTubers "Two Set Violin" uploaded an amazing cover of [Sibelius' Violin Concerto](#): one violin played the solo violin part and the other playing the entire orchestral score compressed into one violin score!

The Hurdy-gurdy through time.

The hurdy-gurdy probably isn't an instrument that comes to mind immediately, although perhaps it should be when it carries with it such an interesting story. Also referred to as a wheel fiddle, the hurdy-gurdy has been used in folk and classical music historically, however more recently it has gained popularity for being used in heavy-metal music! This memorably named medieval stringed instrument is operated by a hand-turned crank. This movement turns a rosined wheel, which rubs against the strings to produce a sound.



Hurdy-gurdy played by a French lady of fashion, 18th century

The hurdy-gurdy dates back to the 10th century when two people would play the instrument together in church. It required two people to play, as it has melody and drone strings. Most often, a hurdy-gurdy will have 6 strings, however, they can also be found with as few as 3. There is a combination of melody and drone strings, allowing the instrument to produce a texture similar to the bagpipes. The hurdy-gurdy regained popularity in the 13th century, now playing secular music instead. In the 20th century, street musicians in France and eastern Europe embraced this instrument, making it a large part of the modern-day culture in some parts of the world.



Modern Electric Hurdy-gurdy



Michalina Malisz plays the hurdy-gurdy. Picture: YouTube / Michalina Malisz

One of the many beauties of this instrument is its versatility in design, with different regions playing different variations of the instrument. Most recently, it has been adapted to an electric version for heavy metal. Each version of the instrument is unique, differing in their bridges, looks and even ranges of pitch. On YouTube, Polish hurdy-gurdyist Michalina Malisz is drawing much-needed attention to her unique instrument and discovering new repertoire for it. Michalina says she loves blending the sound of the hurdy-gurdy with her favourite genres: metal, Celtic and cinematic music. This demonstrates its versatility, once again. Her most popular video has over two million views, and she has over one hundred thousand subscribers! She is also part of a Swiss folk-metal band called 'Eluveitie' where she plays a traditional hurdy-gurdy, as opposed to an electric one, demonstrating the sheer versatility of this incredible instrument. The origins of the hurdy-gurdy are unknown, but one theory says that when the Moors (a North African group) invaded Spain in 711 AD, they brought with them many string and bowed instruments. There is no proof that the hurdy-gurdy was one of them, but the possibility exists that something similar arrived in Spain at that time and dispersed throughout Europe.



Overall, the hurdy-gurdy is a very flexible instrument, with its unique sound fitting well in a variety of genres. Different parts of the world have adapted it to their taste, giving it a large amount of individuality. Generally, it is not a very well-known instrument in mainstream music, although it is still quite popular in folk and certain metal genres. Perhaps there is another hurdy-gurdy renaissance to come!

Sanehah Nadeem
10M



What we're listening to: *The Wave That Got Away ~ Ben Levin Group*

Ben Levin is a guitarist and YouTuber who founded the experimental rock band to which this EP is accredited. The Wave That Got Away is a beautiful demonstration of how lyric and instrumentation can come together to create something powerful. Through just three tracks you experience pain, excitement, loss, joy, and hope. Ben's group recorded the album live, and you can watch the session [here](#). -**Charlie Moore L3**