

Featured Article

Conversation with Deryck Cooke about Mahler's Tenth Symphony 5 August, 1976, London

by Avik Gilboa

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AG Did you ever meet Alma?

DC No. I met Anna but I never met Alma. She was living in America and I never came over.

AG Anna lived here for awhile.

DC Yes, Anna commutes between New York and London and I met her several times. She was always on the side of the Mahler Tenth provided that it was made clear that it was not a Mahler symphony, but it was a performing version of state of the work as Mahler left it. She never objected. And, of course, Alma eventually withdrew her veto.

AG Since you opened the door, let's hear the story from the beginning. What exactly happened? How did you and the Tenth get together?

DC Well, it was funny really, I never had the intention of doing anything about the Tenth. In 1960 the BBC had a proper Mahler celebration for the centenary [of his birth]. The year before I had resigned from the BBC to take up free-lance, and so I wanted jobs, and jobs on the radio. So I went this friend of mine, Robert Simpson, a composer, who was putting on the Mahler series, and said, what are you doing about the Tenth?

I'm telling this story in the wrong order. What they asked me to do first was to write a booklet on Mahler. It was while I was writing this booklet on Mahler I thought, what will the listening audience need? So, I wrote the first part of the book as a study of the man and his art, his music, and then the second part of the book I wrote as, more-or-less, a series of program notes, a section on each work. It was a popular book. It was never intended to be an analysis of Mahler's style or anything like that, it simply presented each work and explained what was in it, and what was inspired by it. When I got to the end of the Ninth, I thought I'd better say something about the Tenth. Of course the Tenth was only known by the opening *Adagio* and that little *Purgatorio* movement. I played those through, I listened to them several times, and I thought that it didn't seem to make sense. I knew that he'd left sketches as they said and so I thought that, well, I'll just sit down and copy out the sketches and see if there is anything there, just for the purpose of getting to know it. I sat down and started copying it out and I found to my amazement that - it all had been found out before and known before in the past by other people, but I came to it fresh - the second movement was complete from beginning to end, except that it wasn't all scored, and that it wasn't all composed in detail. There were lots of places where just one instrument, first violins, would be holding the melody and there was no harmony there. Mostly it was in passages where it was being repeated, and you could use the stuff from earlier on to get an idea. And the fourth and fifth movements were written out in complete length, except that they were in piano score, as you might say, in short score we call it. It's a composer's score; he writes out four staves of music and you can play it on the piano, more or less, but it's a score intended for orchestration.

And that was how I got onto it. And then I went to Robert Simpson, and said: "What are you doing about the Tenth." He said: "Well, I suppose we'll play those two movements." I said: "What about a talk?

I've been looking at it. I can give you a talk. We'll play the *Adagio*; we'll play the *Purgatorio*; then [for] the second movement, we'll play certain passages which can be played as they stand. Although they sound a bit lacking in fiber, they'll be listenable, and they'll give you an idea of what Mahler [intended]. [For] the fourth and fifth movement, I'll score certain passages as near as possible as I can get to Mahler's style - a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that you would never get anywhere near Mahler's style." And he accepted this. Then, of course, as I worked on this, I found that I was able to put more into score than I had imagined and eventually we turned up with all five movements. But, in the second and fourth, I had left gaps, because they were the really difficult passages that I didn't think that I could fill in at the time.

AG What were the problems there? The [with the] second and fifth [movements]?

DC The fifth movement was complete, it was the second and fourth which had passages where the content of the music as put down seemed very thin, there would be missing chords. The upper line, the thematic line, would go on, and suddenly chords were lacking. I thought, well, I'd have to supply those chords, and there isn't another passage in the movement where I can get them. So, I left those out. A lot of Mahlerians were at the broadcast, they were all impressed by the complete finale, but they were a bit puzzled by these two, the second and fourth movements, with these gaps, because when you start playing a piece of music and you stop it, and then you say, now here there are these 15 bars gap, and then it goes on like this, and ...

AG And that is what actually happened?

DC Yes, that is what happened on the air. When you say, there's a gap, and then it goes on like this, and it goes on as it did at the beginning, people thought, where are we, what is this? Since the *Purgatorio* movement, in the middle, is full of things which are taken up in the fourth movement, it didn't seem to make sense, so I decided that the only thing to do was to try and somehow produce a full-length score. And, then I worked on that, and then it was on the 13th of August 1964 that here in England, at the Proms, with Berthold Goldschmidt [that the entire symphony was played]. He worked with me on the score, actually. When I began this score, I had written orchestral music before, but it is just as well that he worked with me on it, because I was trying to just present Mahler without adding anything, if possible. I felt that one shouldn't add anything, it's his music. Goldschmidt said: "Look if you are going to begin this fourth movement you got to have some tremendous explosion to begin it with. Why don't you use the [flutter tongue] on this trumpet call. We had long argument about that. He said, well it won't come across if you don't do that. He persuaded me to a certain extent to stop being purist and to go on and try to make something of it.

AG Any problems with Alma or with the copyright?

DC No, it was funny with the copyright because the copyright was owned by AMP. When they brought out the *Adagio* and the *Purgatorio* in a published score, Mrs. Mahler assigned the copyright to them of this version of the Tenth and any other version of the Tenth that might ever be made³. She was in favor of a version being made, people asked Schoenberg at her approval.⁴ But Schoenberg didn't want [to do it].

AG Anyone else try it before you?

DC Oh yes, sure, there was an American, Clinton Carpenter, and [the English composer] Joe Wheeler. There was also a German called Hans Wohlschläger, who worked on a version for years and years. He was a member of the Mahler Society, the Viennese Society.

AG Whatever happened to that version?

DC It's very funny, because recently since my final version came out, and was recorded, he got a recording of it. I don't know him. When my broadcast went out, this one we've just been talking about,

³ This does not seem correct, at least by USA copyright law.

⁴ Actually, Jack Diether, at a party at Alma's, at which Schonberg was in attendance, suggested to Alma to ask Schoenberg to look at the MS. He looked at it maybe one-half hour and then declined.

he wrote me a letter, friendly, offering some criticisms, and I wrote back to him. But it then it all dropped, it was 1960. In 1976 he got hold of the Wyn Morris recording, my final version. He wrote me a letter, one of the most amazing letters I've ever had. It was a complete letter of tribute. I think it is very difficult for a man who has actually worked on a thing for a long, long time and then writes and says, well you've got it, you have done it. He said: "You've struck the balance between without getting too much of yourself into it. I feel that in my version there is too much of myself. I can't manage to make it stand up without putting some more of myself into it, and it's interfering with Mahler. I've decided not to go any further with my version because it's in better hands."⁵ It's a marvelous letter to write, so naturally I wrote back and we've had a correspondence since then.

AG Where is he living?
DC Bamberg.

AG Did you ever see the score of the Wheeler or the Carpenter?
DC Joe Wheeler and I met one morning and I just glanced through his score; it takes a long time. I had just an hour to look at it, and we were talking all the time, and Goldschmidt was there. When I went to America, Jack Diether had gotten a copy of Clinton Carpenter's score, which I looked at for about half an hour. But you can't -- it takes a long time to get inside a score. So I could form no opinion of it. Joe Wheeler's version had a disastrous performance in London by an amateur orchestra, from which one could really tell nothing. So I offer no opinion about their versions at all.

AG Carpenter, with whom I spoke about a month ago, said that he wanted to look at the score of yours because he wanted to compare, and I finally got him together here with Faber music and I'm assuming that he'll get a score. What has been the reaction beyond that point among conductors, music critics?
DC I think that the music press in England and in the USA has been very good for me. It's been remarkably good. They all said that it's something which is definitely Mahler and is making an impact, and what an impact, because it's Mahler's last work.

Conductors have been very suspicious. Klemperer was very rude to me - a terribly long story. When it was done, back in 1960, the radio version with the gaps, I had a letter from a German musical journalist, who was fascinated because he was mad on the Mahler Tenth, and he wanted to know all about it. He wrote to me and he also wrote to the radio in Cologne and said, shouldn't they put this on in Germany? He got back a very nasty letter from an official of Cologne Radio who said we are of the opinion that Mr. Cooke has not done Mahler a service in making this score as is confirmed by Dr. Klemperer and Lorin Maazel. So I thought, well I don't know about that. Both Klemperer and Maazel came over to England soon after that and I saw Maazel. He said, he had never seen it, and he never said anything about it, and he actually listened to my version with the facsimile, and said it was quite amazing. He had never done it, but the thing is, he has a marvelous grasp in looking at things picking up things very fast.

Well, then Klemperer came. Berthold Goldschmidt is an old friend of Klemperer, they were together in the old Berlin days with Kleiber and Fürtwangler, and every time Klemperer comes to London Goldschmidt goes to his concerts. He said, I'll take you along to a rehearsal, it was Song of the Earth. We sat there watching him rehearse. When the break came, Goldschmidt took me forward. I was very, very nervous, and tentative. Then he [Goldschmidt] said this is my friend Deryck Cooke, Dr. Klemperer, and I put out my hand. Suddenly, Klemperer looked at me, looked at my hand, ignored it, and said "Ich ken ihn nicht" - I don't know you! So I thought, well, golly, I looked at it like this. Klemperer was a very strange man at the end of his life, his brain trouble, and God knows what, and everybody thought that he was a crazy character, so I thought I'll not take any notice of that, that's just

⁵ It is usually explained that Erwin Ratz, President of the International Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft, Vienna, put pressure on Wohlschläger to withdraw his version. Ratz was utterly opposed to any attempt to "finish" the Tenth and to this day the whole Tenth is not played in Vienna. Wohlschläger wrote an article and gave a lecture in which he used the Ratz explanation. As an afterthought, Slatkin is playing the Mazzetti version of the Tenth in Vienna in January 17.

one of his "Klempererisms" Eventually, after the morning rehearsal, Goldschmidt went and found the table of Klemperer, banging the table, and eventually I was called over. Klemperer was quite hostile, really. He said: "Are you a Composer?" I said that have written some music. He said "Where is the material, what material have you got for this Mahler Tenth?" Then Klemperer's daughter leant over and said: "Father, a facsimile of the manuscript was published." [Klemperer] I don't know about the facsimile. I do the *Adagio*." Then we said: "Would you like to listen to a tape? He wouldn't, he didn't want to know about that. This was all very unpleasant.

There is also Kubelik, who doesn't really feel that it adds up a Mahler symphony, he said, that's his phrase. But I said it isn't meant to add up to a Mahler symphony, it's meant to add up to a performing version of Mahler's Tenth as far as he reached before he died.

But I think that these older conductors are very suspicious, because they've lived in the Mahler world for so long. Who is this English chap whom they have never heard of? How could he know about it? I think that this is quite understandable. What happened with Mrs. Mahler - I found out this eventually - [is that] she never heard the BBC tape, at all, but she gave her permission for it to take place and then she wrote and said that she misunderstood what it was, she thought that it was a talk with a few illustrations. It turned out to be full-length, nearly full-length, --

AG She retracted her permission?
DC And Bruno Walter wrote to her, the letter came out years later, in Bruno Walter's correspondence. Actually I didn't even know it had come out but the publishing firm, Fischer, rang me up and said could they have a bit of biographical information, and I said, "Why?" Then I said, I know what it is, you're publishing Bruno Walter's letters. They said, yes, that's it. And I said there's a letter there about my version of the Tenth symphony. "How did you know?" I said, "Well it's got to be. You don't want to know anything about me except for that letter." What happened was very nice. He [Walter?] hadn't heard it either, but he said that he had heard about the person who had done it, from people connected with the person who had done it, and he said that as far as he understood the intention was one of high idealism, and that there was nothing commercial about it. It was all very much on the highest level, but unfortunately it could not happen because nobody could do this thing to the Tenth.

Mind you, most of these older people who have said that nothing could be done with the Tenth have never sat down and actually copied it out. I can understand them because you look at the page of the manuscript and think, well, that isn't a piece of music, it isn't all there, and, look, you can't read if that note's C or D or what. You have to work on it for months and years to find out what the note is.

AG What makes the difference, between, let's say, a Leonard Bernstein, who when you approach him about this, turns his head and changes the subject, and an Ormandy who goes out and records it? Why would one react this way and the other the other?
DC Well, I'm not quite sure, but Bernstein - I met Bernstein when I was in New York, and he was very, very pleasant to me - he said: "Deryck Cooke, I think that it's about time we met. I'm a great fan of yours". I nearly dropped through the floor. "Your articles, your articles! Not the Mahler Tenth!" I said: "I'm surprised you don't like it." He said: "It's not particularly what you've done with it, I don't think that it was going to be a good symphony. I think that it was going to be a bad symphony, a transitional work, it may be that he had come out of it and have written something better." And I said to him: "Most of the dedicated Mahlerians I meet feel that it's a marvelous symphony, even as propped up by me". He said "No, I don't think that it's a good work." I've just been reading his book, you know the Harvard lectures, about the meaning of music, he deals with the finale of the Mahler Ninth there, and he mentions the Tenth, and he says something about Mahler's flirtation with Schoenberg in the Tenth. Well, there's no more flirtation with Schoenberg in the Tenth than there is in the Ninth. In fact, in the Ninth there are passages which are even more [Schoenbergian?]. Maybe he feels that he ought to have done it himself. It's a bit critical to say that because after all he is a dedicated Mahlerian. He is a composer and he a wonderful scorer. He could

have done it, if he had had the time to spend the time working on it. Maybe he feels that he --

AG Maybe a sour grapes reaction?

DC Not really sour grapes, no, I don't want to say that, but it could be a thing like, Why the hell should I conduct somebody else's version, I could have done a better one.

AG But he didn't!

DC Maybe it's nothing of the kind. Maybe he does think that the Tenth was not going to be a good work. But the funny thing is, my version, one has to call it my version, is actually Mahler's Tenth as far as he had got with it. And therefore, he can hear [it]. All the thematic line is Mahler. There's not a single main thematic line which is mine. Once or twice I've added a counter melody, which is based on Mahler's own motives. What I've done to it is unnoticeable, really. Therefore, the Tenth symphony is like that, as far as Mahler had taken it. It is marvelous. The actual Mahler in it is marvelous and the Mahler dwarfs what bits of support and propping I had to give it.

AG I think that all moral, or maybe even legal questions, shouldn't that be really unimportant to people, because you do call it a "performing version."

DC I found it very difficult to get this across. I hope that now that the score is published, with on the front: Mahler, the performing version of the draft of the Tenth symphony, prepared by Deryk Cooke, I hope the message will get across. When Kubelik was interviewed for *The Gramophone* by Allen Blythe, [he said]: "I am afraid that I don't really think -- it's very, very interesting, and remarkable, but I don't think that it quite adds up to a symphony by Mahler." Well, it can't add up to a symphony by Mahler because Mahler never finished it. Look at all the elaborations that would have gone into the completion of it. I'm perfectly prepared to admit that this version of the Tenth is too harmonic in places, there are chords, whereas with Mahler there would have been counterpoint. But, that's all we can do. I can't write Mahlerian counterpoints, nobody can do Mahler's counterpoint for him. It's a creative thing.

AG You had really no other support, we've had two recordings, right, Wyn Morris, and the Ormandy. Any indications that anyone else may -- I know that it has been performed.

DC I'm hoping that Haitink might do it, but he hasn't said he will. I've been in touch with him but not about this. I vaguely know him. I'm having a meeting with him to see whether he will do it. He's a bit of a purist, you know. I quite understand people -- they say, this isn't what Mahler would have done, and therefore I don't want to know anything about it. I understand that point of view. One really doesn't want to listen to works which aren't really finished by the composer. But this is a special case. So whether Haitink will change his mind, or not, I don't know. Martinon did it, of course, I'm supposed to be getting a disk of that, or a tape from Holland, the Holland Festival performance. It was a wonderful performance, by the way. So marvelous. They must have worked at rehearsals for weeks.

AG We heard another concert of it with old papa, what's his name, cuddles, Joseph Krips, in San Francisco.

DC Yes, I heard a tape of that, a pirated tape.... 🎵

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Boulder, CO USA
10 June 1996