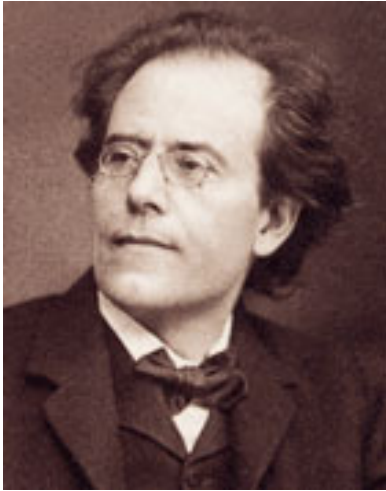


## Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)



Born: 1860 (Kalischt, Bohemia)  
Died: 1911 (Vienna, Austria)

### FAST FACTS

- Attended and won competitions at the Vienna Conservatory
- Primary career was in conducting opera and orchestras
- Faced heavy oppression from Germans for his Jewish heritage
- His 8<sup>th</sup> Symphony required over 1000 orchestra musicians and singers
- Wrote *lieder* (German songs) based on both pleasant and dark themes in his life

Gustav Mahler's life was marked with difficulty in many areas, and his music served as an outlet for his struggles. His pieces are often regarded stormy and harsh, and can be heavily criticized by listeners, but are still considered brilliant masterworks of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Mahler showed musical talent in his childhood, so his father agreed to pay for piano lessons. Mahler eventually attended the Vienna Conservatory, where he won awards for piano playing and composition. In Vienna, however, the musical community was prejudiced against people of Jewish faith and heritage, like Mahler. He faced oppression due to these prejudices, and decided to strengthen his career as an orchestra conductor in Bohemia and Hungary before seeking positions with more prominent orchestras.

Mahler became infamous for treating his orchestras very strictly, but also for producing amazing performances of his music. His nine symphonies were full of emotion and complexity, often being too much for audiences to listen to for that time and even for today. His eighth symphony required around one thousand musicians, two choirs (one adult choir and one children's choir), four times as many winds as in a normal orchestra, and a massive percussion section. Mahler had the idea that a symphony should be an "entire world" of performers and sounds. When Mahler began writing these large orchestra pieces, though, his five-year-old daughter suddenly died, his marriage was struggling, and he faced continued racist oppression from the government and the public in Vienna. This caused him to convert from Judaism to Roman Catholicism.

Those who thought Mahler's symphonies were too overwhelming found his *lieder*, the German word for "songs", a bit more beautiful and enjoyable. His *lieder*, however, were often based on nature themes and depressing themes, which were reflected in the events in his life. Some of his songs, for example, are based on eight of his siblings' deaths, his own daughter's death, and his heart disease complications. Mahler's music was not well-received after he died because of its Romantic-period intensity, and is still gaining respect and acceptance today.



### Let's Listen!

- [Click here](#) to watch Leonard Bernstein conduct Gustav Mahler's famous *Symphony No. 8 in Eb minor* (the "*Symphony of a Thousand*").
- Listen to some of Mahler's beautiful *lieder* on themes of nature, *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*: [click here](#).