

American Performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony

by Mary Wagner

Mahler performances in the United States deserve documentation for what they reveal about the longevity of his music in the concert hall and the frequency of performance. Both factors affect the way his music is perceived, and shed some light on the status some works have in this country. When I began to research the performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony in America, I realized that the University of Michigan archives contained many programs from major symphony orchestras since the beginning of the twentieth century. Although performances of the Sixth Symphony occurred since 1906 in Europe, it took another sixty years for the Symphony to appear in the regular programming in America.

The Orchestras

This study is based on performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony by five major orchestras including the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and the Philadelphia Orchestra. I selected these orchestras based on their long standing history, size, season schedule, and availability of programs.

Many of these orchestral organizations recorded the performance dates of the Sixth Symphony, the conductors, and the locations. However, none of the orchestras stored the order of the inner movements for performances. This is probably no surprise for two reasons. First, as archive departments create databases, they hope to primarily document the title of the work, composer, conductor, but they do not create additional fields for the movements, since the order of most symphonies is generally fixed. Furthermore, since most conductors relied on the 1963 critical edition for many years, there appeared no reason to keep track of these details. Therefore, to verify the order, researchers must refer to the original concert programs.

Based on a selection of the programs reviewed, conductors of these orchestras usually performed the Symphony with the Scherzo as the second movement and the Andante as the third movement. In selected performances the program notes discussed this program order based on two accounts. Primarily, conductors depended on the order specified in the 1963 edition. Secondly, a number of program notes mentioned Alma Mahler's opinion and telegram to Mengelberg that the Scherzo should precede the Andante as an important factor.

Some Surprises

Surprise No 1: Until the mid-1960s the Sixth Symphony rarely appeared in the repertoire of these major orchestras. Even though Dmitri Mitropoulos conducted the American premiere at the New York Philharmonic on 11 December 1947, audiences did not hear the work again until more than six years later when Mitropoulos conducted the work on 7 April 1955, with the New York Philharmonic.

Many audiences beyond New York first heard the work in the mid- to late- 1960s. With the critical edition published by the Gesamtausgabe in 1963, a number of American orchestras began to include the Symphony in their programming. Since many orchestras plan their seasons at least twelve months in advance, several more years passed before orchestras actually performed the Sixth Symphony. Seventeen years after the first American premiere, the Boston Symphony Orchestra first performed the work on 13 November 1964. Between 1967 and 1968 three more orchestras joined the list as Georg Szell conducted The Cleveland Orchestra in a first performance on 12 October 1967. A few months later on 4 January 1968 Anton Dorati conducted the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in a performance and by 31 October 1968 Claudio Abbado led the Philadelphia Orchestra in their first performance. From this date forward the Symphony appears to join the standard repertoire of these orchestras. Table 1 presents a list of performances of this work from 1947 until the present.

Table 1. American Performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony from 1947 to early 2006

	Date	Orchestra	Conductor	Off-site location
1	11-Dec-47	New York	Mitropoulos	
2	12-Dec-47	New York	Mitropoulos	
3	13-Dec-47	New York	Mitropoulos	
4	7-Apr-55	New York	Mitropoulos	
5	8-Apr-55	New York	Mitropoulos	
6	10-Apr-55	New York	Mitropoulos	
7	13-Nov-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	on Tour
8	14-Nov-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	on Tour
9	15-Nov-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	
10	17-Nov-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	
11	30-Nov-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	at Washington
12	2-Dec-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	at New York
13	15-Dec-64	Boston	Leinsdorf	at Cambridge
14	14-Jan-65	Boston	Leinsdorf	
15	27-Jan-65	Boston	Leinsdorf	
16	2-Mar-65	Boston	Leinsdorf	at New Brunswick
17	3-Apr-65	Boston	Leinsdorf	at New York
18	29-Apr-65	New York	Steinberg	
19	30-Apr-65	New York	Steinberg	
20	1-May-65	New York	Steinberg	
21	2-May-65	New York	Steinberg	
22	27-Apr-67	New York	Bernstein	
23	28-Apr-67	New York	Bernstein	
24	29-Apr-67	New York	Bernstein	
25	1-May-67	New York	Bernstein	
26	12-Oct-67	Cleveland	Szell	
27	14-Oct-67	Cleveland	Szell	
28	15-Oct-67	Cleveland	Szell	
29	4-Jan-68	Chicago	Dorati	
30	5-Jan-68	Chicago	Dorati	
31	31-Oct-68	Philadelphia	Abbado	
32	1-Nov-68	Philadelphia	Abbado	
33	2-Nov-68	Philadelphia	Abbado	
34	5-Nov-68	Philadelphia	Abbado	at Baltimore
35	20-Nov-69	New York	Szell	
36	21-Nov-69	New York	Szell	
37	22-Nov-69	New York	Szell	
38	24-Nov-69	New York	Szell	
39	30-Mar-70	Chicago	Solti	at Milwaukee
40	2-Apr-70	Chicago	Solti	
41	3-Apr-70	Chicago	Solti	
42	15-Oct-71	Boston	Steinberg	
43	16-Oct-71	Boston	Steinberg	
44	25-Oct-71	Boston	Steinberg	at JFK Center
45	27-Oct-71	Boston	Steinberg	
46	29-Oct-71	Boston	Steinberg	
47	29-Jul-72	Boston	Levine	at Tanglewood
48	30-Jul-72	Boston	Levine	at Tanglewood
49	21-Sep-72	Cleveland	Abbado	
50	23-Sep-72	Cleveland	Abbado	

51	28-Sep-72	New York	Boulez		104	31-Jan-92	Boston	Ozawa	
52	29-Sep-72	New York	Boulez		105	1-Feb-92	Boston	Ozawa	
53	30-Sep-72	New York	Boulez		106	4-Feb-92	Boston	Ozawa	
54	3-Oct-72	New York	Boulez		107	5-Feb-92	Boston	Ozawa	at New York
55	8-Feb-73	Boston	Levine	at Brooklyn	108	6-Feb-92	Boston	Ozawa	at New York
56	8-Nov-73	Chicago	Solti		109	29-Oct-92	New York	Macal	
57	10-Nov-73	Chicago	Solti		110	30-Oct-92	New York	Macal	
58	11-Nov-73	Chicago	Solti		111	31-Oct-92	New York	Macal	
59	17-Nov-73	Chicago	Solti	at Carnegie Hall	112	3-Nov-92	New York	Macal	
60	21-Nov-74	Philadelphia	Dorati		113	26-Nov-93	Chicago	Boulez	
61	22-Nov-74	Philadelphia	Dorati		114	27-Nov-93	Chicago	Boulez	
62	23-Nov-74	Philadelphia	Dorati		115	3-Dec-93	Chicago	Boulez	
63	26-Nov-74	Philadelphia	Dorati		116	22-Feb-96	New York	Gatti	
64	2-Oct-76	New York	Levine		117	23-Feb-96	New York	Gatti	
65	30-Mar-77	Cleveland	Dohnányi		118	24-Feb-96	New York	Gatti	
66	31-Mar-77	Cleveland	Dohnányi		119	27-Feb-96	New York	Gatti	
67	1-Apr-77	Cleveland	Dohnányi		120	21-Mar-96	Chicago	Gielen	
68	1-Feb-79	Chicago	Abbado		121	22-Mar-96	Chicago	Gielen	
69	2-Feb-79	Chicago	Abbado		122	23-Mar-96	Chicago	Gielen	
70	8-Feb-79	Cleveland	Maazel		123	26-Mar-96	Chicago	Gielen	
71	10-Feb-79	Cleveland	Maazel		124	4-Dec-97	Cleveland	Ling	
72	15-Mar-79	New York	Abbado		125	5-Dec-97	Cleveland	Ling	
73	16-Mar-79	New York	Abbado		126	6-Dec-97	Cleveland	Ling	
74	17-Mar-79	New York	Abbado		127	2-Jan-98	New York	Eschanbach	
75	20-Mar-79	New York	Abbado		128	3-Jan-98	New York	Eschanbach	
76	23-Jun-79	Chicago	Levine	at Ravinia	129	5-Jan-98	New York	Eschanbach	
77	4-Nov-79	Chicago	Abbado		130	12-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	
78	24-Apr-81	Boston	Ozawa		131	12-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	
79	25-Apr-81	Boston	Ozawa		132	13-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	
80	14-Oct-82	New York	Sinopoli		133	18-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at London
81	15-Oct-82	New York	Sinopoli		134	20-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at Paris
82	16-Oct-82	New York	Sinopoli		135	23-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at Vienna
83	29-Mar-84	Cleveland	Levine		136	25-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at Munich
84	30-Mar-84	Cleveland	Levine		137	27-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at Athens
85	31-Mar-84	Cleveland	Levine		138	28-Mar-98	Boston	Ozawa	at Athens
86	23-Oct-86	New York	Tennstedt		139	15-Oct-98	Chicago	Eschenbach	
87	24-Oct-86	New York	Tennstedt		140	16-Oct-98	Chicago	Eschenbach	
88	25-Oct-86	New York	Tennstedt		141	17-Oct-98	Chicago	Eschenbach	
89	5-Feb-87	Cleveland	Dohnányi		142	11-Mar-99	Philadelphia	Conlon	
90	7-Feb-87	Cleveland	Dohnányi		143	12-Mar-99	Philadelphia	Conlon	
91	11-Jun-87	Chicago	Herbig		144	13-Mar-99	Philadelphia	Conlon	
92	12-Jun-87	Chicago	Herbig		145	16-Mar-99	Philadelphia	Conlon	at New York
93	13-Jun-87	Chicago	Herbig		146	22-Mar-01	Cleveland	Thomas	
94	16-Feb-90	Philadelphia	Tennstedt		147	23-Mar-01	Cleveland	Thomas	
95	17-Feb-90	Philadelphia	Tennstedt		148	24-Mar-01	Cleveland	Thomas	
96	20-Feb-90	Philadelphia	Tennstedt	at New York	149	29-Mar-01	New York	Maazel	
97	19-Jul-90	Chicago	Conlon	at Ravinia	150	30-Mar-01	New York	Maazel	
98	20-Dec-90	Chicago	Eschenbach		151	31-Mar-01	New York	Maazel	
99	21-Dec-90	Chicago	Eschenbach		152	21-Apr-05	Chicago	Chung	
100	22-Dec-90	Chicago	Eschenbach		153	22-Apr-05	Chicago	Chung	
101	16-May-91	Cleveland	Dohnányi		154	26-Apr-05	Chicago	Slatkin	
102	18-May-91	Cleveland	Dohnányi		155	22-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	
103	30-Jan-92	Boston	Ozawa		156	23-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	

157	24-Jun-05	New York	Maazel
158	25-Jun-05	New York	Maazel
159	10-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach
160	11-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach
161	12-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach
162	15-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach at New York
163	2-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink
164	3-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink
165	4-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink

Creating such a table reveals some interesting statistics. After 1968 the Sixth Symphony appears more consistently in the overall programming of these orchestras. The most common gap in performances is two years and occurred in the following:

	Date	Orchestra	Conductor
Gap 1:	13 June 1987	Chicago	Herbig
	16 February 1990	Philadelphia	Tennstedt
Gap 2:	3 December 1993	Chicago	Boulez
	22 February 1996	New York	Gatti
Gap 3:	16 March 1999	Philadelphia	Sawallisch
	22 March 2001	Cleveland	Tilson Thomas

However, even more surprising than this first gap in performances is the largest gap of almost four years which most recently occurred between 2001 and 2005 with the performance of Maazel conducting the work on 31 March 2001. The next occurrence happened when Chung conducted the work in a performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on 21 April 2005.

If the Sixth Symphony had momentarily been placed on the back shelf for a few years, it appears that the latest concern in the order of the inner movements has added a renewed interest in programming the work for new audiences to arrive at new opinions.

Recent Performance Practices

Over the period of less than one year from 21 April 2005 to 4 February 2006 the Sixth Symphony enjoyed fourteen performances by four out of the five orchestras in the study. Table 2 indicates the programs and the order of the inner movements. Only The Cleveland Orchestra did not perform this Symphony in the 2004-5 or 2005-6 season.

Table 2 Recent Programs and the Order of the Inner Movements.

Date	Orchestra	Conductor	Order
21-Apr-05	Chicago	Chung	Scherzo-Andante
22-Apr-05	Chicago	Chung	Scherzo-Andante
26-Apr-05	Chicago	Slatkin	Scherzo-Andante
22-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	Andante-Scherzo
23-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	Andante-Scherzo
24-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	Andante-Scherzo
25-Jun-05	New York	Maazel	Andante-Scherzo
10-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach	Scherzo-Andante
11-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach	Scherzo-Andante
12-Nov-05	Philadelphia	Eschenbach	Scherzo-Andante
15-Nov-05	*Philadelphia	Eschenbach	Scherzo-Andante
2-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink	Scherzo-Andante
3-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink	Scherzo-Andante
4-Feb-06	Boston	Haitink	Scherzo-Andante

Surprise No. 2: Based on the advertisements, reviews, and websites one major trend that stands out from earlier performances is the

program. In recent performances the Sixth Symphony offered the major and only piece programmed on the concert. Historically, however, the symphony usually constituted only a portion of the program. The advertisements and websites for the 2005-6 performance clearly and consistently informed concertgoers that there will be "No Intermission" and that the Symphony, which lasts ninety minutes, will be heard in its entirety.

This type of programming brings up another set of questions that could be further investigated. Has the Sixth Symphony risen to the level of other great works such as the Beethoven Ninth Symphony, in that it is the focal point of the evening? A second point to consider is whether this type of programming for the Symphony appears common in other countries or only in America. Are American programs shorter in length due to the brief attention span of the audience or is this a matter of budget constraints? With the shrinking budget of orchestras has the preparation time and performance time of the Symphony influenced the programming? If a conductor added another work to the program, would it exceed the allotted union rehearsal and performance guidelines, thus ultimately exceeding the budget?

Surprise No. 3: Although some readers may be more interested in knowing the actual program order of the Symphony, this issue seemed to appear of secondary importance in promoting the overall programs. Only two out of the four orchestras, namely the New York Philharmonic and the Philadelphia Orchestra, clearly indicated the order of the movements in promotional material. Details regarding the movement order for the Boston Symphony were missing from entertainment sections of the newspapers, websites, and even the Orchestra's webpage. Only a link to an option to download the program notes for the concerts alluded to the Symphony's order. As for the Chicago performances, the program order could be verified through reading the reviews. Of these four orchestras, only the New York Philharmonic placed the Andante before the Scherzo on the program in a recent performance.

Surprise No. 4: Another surprise beyond the program order focused on what to include on a program with the Sixth Symphony and where to place the intermission. The America premier conducted by Mitropoulos used the order of Allegro, Andante, Scherzo, and Finale. For the first two evenings the concert opened with Mahler's Sixth Symphony, and after intermission, the second half of the program featured pianist Oscar Levant in Gershwin's Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in F major. On the Sunday performance of 13 December 1947 Mitropoulos moved the Symphony to the second half of the program and opened with Beethoven's "Coriolanus" Overture. The second piece featured violist William Lincer in the Handel-Casadesus Concerto for Viola and Orchestra in B minor.

Several years later, Mitropoulos conducted two performances of Mahler's Sixth Symphony in April 1955 in the same order; however, he broke the continuity of the work when he placed the intermission after the second movement. This program opened with Morton Gould's then recent work *Show Piece for Orchestra*.

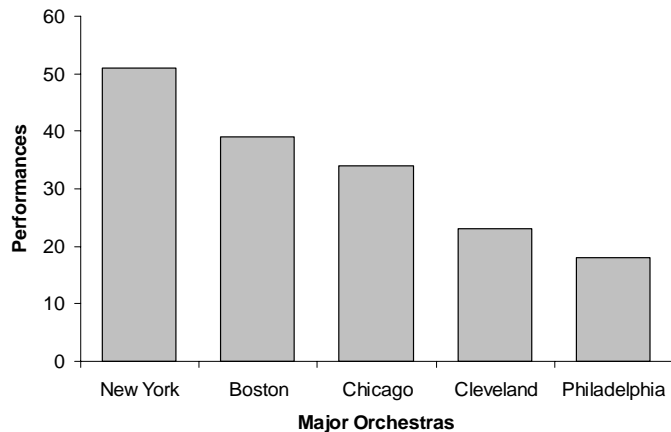
When the Philharmonic programmed the work ten years later, Steinberg ran into the same dilemma when he combined the work with Haydn Symphony No. 49 in F minor ("La Passione"). After opening with the Haydn work, Steinberg conducted the first movement of the Sixth Symphony and then inserted an intermission. He then offered the remaining movements in the order of Scherzo, Andante, and Allegro. In the years to follow conductors retained the order Scherzo-Andante as Bernstein led a 1967 performance and Szell created a legendary live recording in 1969.

Popularity in Programming

The Sixth Symphony has been performed a total of 165 times since 1947 by the five orchestras reviewed. The New York Philharmonic Orchestra leads the ranking of Mahler's Sixth Symphony performances with fifty-one occurrences. This is almost more than three times the number of performances by the Philadelphia Orchestra and more than double the number of Cleveland Orchestra performances. A bar chart rates the frequency of these performances in Table 3.

Readers should bear in mind that even though the New York Philharmonic leads in frequency, historically the Orchestra has also enjoyed one of the busiest and longest seasons, which leaves the New York Philharmonic more slots open to program such works. If one looks at when the Sixth Symphony joined the mainstream of programming in the mid-1960s and removes extreme dates from the data collection, the New York Philharmonic still performed the Symphony forty-five times since 1965.

Table 3 Frequency of Performances of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony



Comparisons with Other Works by Mahler

Although the scope of this paper does not allow time to explore all the aspects of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony performances in America, data is available to report the number of Sixth Symphony performances compared with other Mahler works by the New York Philharmonic. Table 4 presents the performance frequency of each major work by Mahler. At first, I thought the Sixth Symphony would rank less popular than the other Mahler compositions, but the frequency of performances actually placed the work in the middle. This ranking shows that Symphonies no. 1 and no. 5 stand significantly ahead of the other compositions. Surprisingly, the Philharmonic has performed the Eighth Symphony only thirteen times. Despite this work standing as a favorite among audiences the preparation of the work and budgeting issues may have influenced its frequency.

More recent performances and recordings

Many orchestras also feature recordings of Mahler Sixth’s Symphony. Historically, recordings placed the Scherzo as the second movement. Reviewing the recordings created over the past ten years reveals a similar trend. However, since the year 2000, a new trend has emerged in the recordings. Based on the recordings below in Table 5 sixty percent of the recent recordings placed the Andante before the Scherzo. Inner notes from recordings usually defend keeping the Scherzo-Andante order based on the 1963 critical edition. Recordings that feature the Andante before the Scherzo often justify the order based on Mahler’s preference to conduct the work in this order. When producing the 2002 BBC Philharmonic recording Sir Charles Mackerras commented, “The Scherzo is a kind of ghastly parody of the first movement, and for it to come immediately after the thing it parodies strikes me as silly – they’re too similar.”

Table 5: Order of Inner Movements with Selected Recordings

Year:	Conductor	Orchestra	Inner Movement Order	Publisher
1995	Pierre Boulez	Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra	Scherzo - Andante	Deutsche Grammophon
1995	Thomas Sanderling	St. Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra	Scherzo - Andante	Real Sound
1996	Zubin Mehta	Israel Philharmonic Orchestra	Scherzo - Andante	Elecktra
1998	Yoel Levi	Atlanta Symphony Orchestra	Scherzo - Andante	Telarc
2001	Michael Tilson Thomas	San Francisco Symphony Orchestra	Scherzo - Andante	San Francisco Symphony
2002	Mariss Jansons	London Symphony Orchestra	Andante - Scherzo	London
2002	Sir Charles Mackerras	BBC Philharmonic Orchestra	Andante - Scherzo	BBC Philharmonic
2002	Benjamin Zander	Philharmonic Orchestra of London	Scherzo - Andante	Telarc
2005	Claudio Abbado	Berlin Philharmonic	Andante - Scherzo	Deutsche Grammophon

Table 4 Frequency of Mahler’s Works at the New York Philharmonic Orchestra (NYPO)

Work	Performances	NYPO premiere
Symphony no. 1 (any version)	168	16-Dec-09
Symphony no. 5	133	2-Dec-26
Symphony no. 4	69	6-Nov-04
Symphony no. 9	63	20-Dec-45
Symphony no. 2	61	8-Dec-08
Symphony no. 6	51	11-Dec-47
Symphony no. 3	47	28-Feb-22
Das Lied von der Erde	37	3-Jan-29
Des Knaben Wunderhorn	36	5-Nov-25
Symphony no. 7	35	8-Mar-23
Kindertotenlieder	25	26-Jan-10
Ruckert-Lieder	21	1-Feb-73
Songs of a Wayfarer	15	6-Feb-16
Symphony no. 8	13	6-Apr-50
Das klagende Lied	6	24-Mar-88

Overall, it appears there has been a new trend, especially in the European recordings, to modify the order of movements. In a recent 2004 re-release of Sir John Barbirolli conducting the Berlin Philharmonic, EMI took the liberty to change the Scherzo-Andante order in the 1960s recording, to the order of Andante-Scherzo. With Barbirolli conducting the Symphony in both orders throughout his career, the producer took the liberty to modify the order for this release. Yet, was this the original intent of the conductor for the recording? Will this liberty by the recording industry be taken with other historical recordings of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony?

Conclusion

From this study it appears that conductors select the order they personally prefer leaving the public with two standard versions of the Symphony. Even since 2001, forty percent of these conductors continue to select the order of Scherzo-Andante. While performances from the past can shed light on Sixth Symphony, performance and recordings over the next decade will influence the way a new generation first hears Mahler’s Sixth Symphony. As it stands, there is clear evidence and acceptance that either order of the inner movements is accepted by mainstream conductors and orchestras. Furthermore, conductors still defend, and conduct the Symphony in its original order.

Acknowledgements

Compiling the data for this report could not have been completed with the assistance of archivists and personnel at select orchestras. I sincerely thank Bridget Carr of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Frank Villella of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Carol Jacobs of the Cleveland Orchestra, Darrin T. Britting of the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Richard Wandel of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra for their assistance.