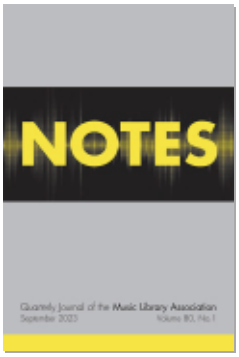
PROJECT MUSE®

Symphonie nr. 3, für Alt-Solo, Knabenchor, Frauenchor und Orchester by Gustav Mahler (review)



James Brooks Kuykendall

Notes, Volume 80, Number 1, September 2023, pp. 186-189 (Review)

Published by Music Library Association
DOI: *https://doi.org/10.1353/not.2023.a905340*

For additional information about this article
https://muse.jhu.edu/article/905340

[132.174.252.65] Project MUSE (2025-07-12 16:42 GMT) University of Mary Washington & (Viva)

MUSIC REVIEWS

Edited by Matthew Ertz

◇

BREITKOPF & HÄRTEL'S NEW EDITION OF MAHLER'S THIRD SYMPHONY

Gustav Mahler. Symphonie nr. 3, für Alt-Solo, Knabenchor, Frauenchor und Orchester. Edited by Christian Rudolf Riedel. ([Die Symphonien = The symphonies]). Wiesbaden: Breitkopf & Härtel, 2021. [Front matter in Ger. and Eng.,: series foreword, p. iii–iv; series introduction, p. v–viii; volume preface, p. ix–xii; sung texts, p. xiii; scoring, p. xiv; score p. 1–254; facsimile, p. 255; ed. rep., 256–68; Einzelanmerkungen (in Ger. only) p. 268–72; glossary, p. 273–74. PB 5633 ISMN 9790004215302. $239 (€222) (pbk.); PB 5663 ISMN 9790004216002. $364 (€339) (hbk.)]

Explicitly making posthumous amends to the composer for ignoring his submissions in 1896, Breitkopf & Härtel (Breitkopf) launched a new edition of all of Mahler's symphonies (including *Das Lied von der Erde*, the single-movement "Blumine," and even the unfinished Tenth), an ambitious flagship project to celebrate the tercentenary of the firm in 2019. At least one new volume of the anticipated dozen has appeared each year since, pandemic notwithstanding. Assuming that impressive rate continues, the whole series will be complete by 2030. With more than one-third of the project already complete, Breitkopf is a match for its rival—the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft (IGMG), which has been laboring to publish a new critical edition of his complete works (*Neue Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke Gustav Mahlers*, familiarly *NKG*). Working in collaboration with several publishers, only nine of the twenty-seven expected volumes of the *NKG* have yet appeared—and seven of those were published in the initial burst of activity during 2008–2012.

The two projects are not identical. The *NKG* has a larger scope, in that it seeks both to present the complete works and to provide a basis not just for performance but for scholarship and analysis. Thus, the *NKG* accounts in much greater detail for the mass of variant readings that Mahler considered at one time or another—and Mahler's alterations to his scores are the stuff of legend. By contrast, Breitkopf's objective is "to present a reliable music text of Mahler's intended 'definitive version' [Fassung letzter Hand] for the purpose of musical practice" (p. 267; Ger. on p. 261). This essentially amounts to a clean and usable *textus receptus*. Pointedly, Breitkopf has even intentionally left off the label "Urtext" for this series, as explained in their FAQ for the editions, https://www.breitkopf.com/program/highlights/gustav-mahler-die-symphonien/faq (accessed 21 March 2023). These are indeed text-critical editions, but the critical methods are directed toward verifying and emending the text that appeared in the editions of the IGMG that started appearing in 1960.

[132.174.252.65] Project MUSE (2025-07-12 16:42 GMT) University of Mary Washington & (Viva)

Erwin Ratz's IGMG revision of Symphony no. 3 appeared in 1974, published by Universal Edition, and has *faute de mieux* been the standard text for the work. From the start, however, it was plagued with textual problems. Some of these were a natural result of economizing: rather than newly engraved plates, Ratz's revisions were made by updating the plates of the 1906 second edition (also Universal). These changes were only inconsistently updated in the plates of the old performing materials; consequently, the parts have never fully corresponded to the readings of the IGMG score. Of course, whether the completeness of these updates mattered very much depended on whether orchestras invested in new parts. In many cases they did not, and both older and newer printings of the performance materials have continued to accumulate a host of alterations as their librarians tried to emend the text to try to conform to Ratz's edition (or to whatever readings a conductor preferred). It is a mess—and the IGMG's effort to clean it up now (in form of the *NKG*) is certainly to be applauded. For the Third Symphony, Breitkopf got there first.

Breitkopf's volume does not present the ideal text for the Mahler scholar: aimed primarily at eliminating problems in performance, it has relatively little to say about the evolving readings. There were a few instances where I was intrigued by an idiosyncratic reading and could not trace it to an earlier edition (or, although I found it in Ratz, there was no explanatory documentation there); the Breitkopf critical apparatus is very extensive but does not seek to be comprehensive, and the lack of a comment left me uncertain how this deviation from the earlier sources had come about. This is a lacuna to be filled by an *NKG* volume of the work—as such documentation is exactly what that edition seeks to provide. Whether the market will then bear that expense whenever that volume sees the light of day remains to be seen. Its acquisition should certainly be a priority for research libraries, but it seems unlikely that it will be able to compete with the Breitfkopf among performers.

Different though these projects may be, it is scarcely surprising to see that there is no cooperation between the firms: extant galley proofs with Mahler's corrections for both the 1899 first edition and the 1906 were not available to Riedel as they are on deposit by Universal at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. Neither source "could . . . be examined, since access was not authorized by the owner" (p. 262). We will have to wait until the *NKG* volume of the Third Symphony to learn what their textual value are, but as they naturally preceded the publication of their respective editions, it seems unlikely that there would be anything consequential.

Even given the narrower scope of the Breitkopf project—the clean, accurate, and authoritative performing text—its virtues are not merely cosmetic. Editor Christian Rudolf Riedel has done his philological homework. For the 1974 edition, Ratz listed only six sources as the basis for his revision. (He evidently had scant interest in consulting the early printed parts, although his remarks indicate that he did at least refer to them for clarification although not for collation.) Riedel accounts for sixteen sources, of which the most important are five individual copies of the first edition of the full score, each of which has Mahler's own corrections. Ratz had relied on only one of these—Mahler's own conducting score—but the other marked copies provide important supplementary and clarifying information. (One of these was only partially available to Riedel, as it is now in private hands: the scans made available by Sotheby's at the time of its auction

together with an abbreviated itemized list of Mahler's markings were all that could be consulted.) Riedel's full collation of thirteen sources yields a text that is a marked improvement on anything else available—as close as seems possible to Mahler's last thoughts. This is all to say that Breitkopf has at last given us the edition IGMG claimed to be presenting half a century ago.

Breitkopf's editorial policies wisely allow for the standardization of some of Mahler's instructions; for example, his various indications to raise the bell of the instrument are condensed into the single abbreviation "Schalltr. auf!" Policy also dictates the transference of a tempo modification (e.g., accel., rit.) which in the autograph and previous editions appeared only above a specific staff to apply universally. Obviously, this is not possible in those instances when the player is explicitly instructed "ohne Rücksicht auf die andern / without considering the others," there are other instances (e.g., I/389–91, and I/719–24) where I was uncertain why such a sensible policy was not observed.

This is a bilingual publication (German and English), with the exception of the critical notes documenting individual variants, which appear in German only. A user with only the basic "musician's German" could navigate most of these with very little difficulty. Familiarity with abbreviations will take one a long way. There are a few instances which require more fluency, but it is likely that anyone interested in the more arcane textual matters would have acquired a grasp of the specialized vocabulary needed to follow the discussion. There is, additionally, a glossary at the end of the volume. This is not merely a handy resource; it is even an enjoyable aesthetic experience in its own right. I was struck that reading through these two pages of Mahler's evocative expressive and technical instructions (and his liberal use of exclamation marks) was akin to a perusal of the whole work again, albeit in a disjointed, alphabetical order. Although I was not seeking omissions, I did notice the absence of at least one term in the glossary: the E♭ clarinet's "frech" at rehearsal 13 in the third movement (p. 170) exceeded my vocabulary. I looked it up: "cheeky." Now there's a Mahlerian instruction for you.

In the list of the performing forces required (p. xiv), the triangle is inexplicably omitted. "Cymbals," too, is hardly adequate to explain that in addition to crash cymbals, another pair is used with the bass drum (with one cymbal fixed to the body of the drum), and a suspended cymbal is also needed. Such carelessness is surprising in an edition otherwise so meticulously presented. That said, no translator is credited for providing the English text, which may be scrupulously literal, but is occasionally stilted and potentially bewildering. As an example: "This . . . fits well with the hymn-like melody and the archaic harmony, also making rich use of secondary scale degrees [Nebenstufen]" (p. xii); perhaps "secondary tonal areas" would be a better translation. Even more puzzling is this comment about Mahler's own sense that the fourth and sixth movements of the symphony were "most profoundly serious": "[t]he aperçu becomes more comprehensible when bearing in mind that Mahler, who is describing [*recte* descriptive?] in the other movements, is speaking here quasi as [*sic*] the subject" (p. xii); the original reads ". . . der in den anderen Sätzen gleichsam beschreibt, hier als Subjekt spricht" (p. x). Perhaps "expresses his own subjective experience" would better capture the spirit of that last clause.

All of this notwithstanding, Breitkopf has spared no expense to make this edition attractive as the new standard text for performers, with considerable attention to the presentation of

the materials. Both full score and parts are a generous 27 × 36 cm; the vocal-choral scores are 23 × 30 cm. Although only the full score was submitted for this review, the success of Bretikopf's Mahler series depends on the quality of the whole package. I had picked up a promotion pamphlet of "Extracts" for this edition at the publisher's booth at the Music Library Association annual conference a few years ago. It includes sample pages of instrumental parts reproduced at full size; except for the single-line percussion staves, none of the sample pages exceeded eleven staves on a page, and each staff was 8 mm in height, with correspondingly large note heads and all other symbols; these can be read clearly from six feet away. (This pamphlet is available online at https://issuu.com/breitkopf/docs/bm_400_issuu?e=23479955/69886155 and is worth browsing.) In the full score under review, the staves are necessarily somewhat smaller, generally 5 mm; the densest page was the final page of the first movement (p. 111), where the staves measured 4.5 mm with twenty-eight staves on the page. The variance of the staff size was imperceptible and allowed for sufficient spacing between the staves so that nothing appears overcrowded. While there is an aim for uniform presentation across the whole series, some of Mahler's biggest moments (e.g., Symphony no. 8) will doubtless require an even further reduction of the staff size in the full score.

The foreword for the edition notes particularly the goal of "optimal readability," which has certainly been achieved in this volume. Moreover,

> [p]articular attention was given to making the orchestral parts more practical by collaborating in their development with librarians of leading orchestras and taking into account not only obvious requirements such as extensive orientation systems (cues, counting tools, structural rests), page-turns, and the like, but also to other, sometimes very special practical aspects such as transposed parts for instruments no longer common today, or extra parts, for example, for Mahler's sometimes desired orchestral reinforcements. (p. iv)

("Counting tools" is a translation of "Zählhilfen," and apparently refers to supplemental numberings when there are several ditto measures in a row; if there is a simple term for that in English, I don't know what it is.) Orchestra librarians have had more than a century to accumulate a list of complaints about the Mahler parts that have been in use, and careful planning and consultation has enabled Breitkopf to reap the benefits. Judging from the materials reviewed this is the most user-friendly edition of *any* music I have ever examined. That this could be achieved with a work of such complexity as a Mahler symphony is a feat in itself, but that it was attempted at all is something we should all celebrate. If orchestras are still spending their resources on upgrading their libraries of standard repertoire, the list price of €2990 for the full set of parts for this work seems a great value. Thus far the Breitkopf scores have been listed at 20–30 percent higher prices than the corresponding volumes of the *NKG*. The various discounts Breitkopf offers for subscription to the whole series may be an attempted end-run around the *NKG*, but make the Breitkopf product even more attractive. I doubt that many orchestra librarians would ever regret such an investment.

James Brooks Kuykendall
University of Mary Washington