

GABRYEL SMITH

Gustav Mahler at the New York Philharmonic: Pandemic Programming Through Online Collections

The international Gustav Mahler Festival 2020, scheduled to feature performances by the orchestras of New York, Vienna, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Budapest, was canceled due to the pandemic. In response, the New York Philharmonic organized a two-week online festival, the first in the orchestra's history. The Philharmonic's digital archives—the leading collection of Mahler's New York years—became the central resource for the virtual festival. Over the course of a few short weeks Philharmonic archivists and editorial staff produced five online exhibits and one virtual walking tour in partnership with Google Arts & Culture. Philharmonic musicians created virtual recordings of excerpts from Mahler Symphonies Nos. 2 and 5, and narrated "stops" on the virtual walking tour. A Facebook livestream of Leonard Bernstein's 1963 telecast of Mahler Symphony No. 2, originally aired in response to President John F. Kennedy's assassination, was remastered and broadcast. It remains one of the orchestra's most popular virtual events of the past two years. This paper presents how Philharmonic archivists, using the Philharmonic's digitized collections as well as those of the New York Public Library and the Library of Congress, curated and produced the virtual Mahler in New York festival. It in turn addresses how this material played an augmented hand in shifting the narrative of the well-known but biased story full of anecdotal evidence, critical attacks, and falsehoods regarding Mahler's interpretations of the music he performed, the accounts of these performances in the press, and his relationship with the New York Philharmonic's management. Background on Mahler and the New York Philharmonic: The last two years of Gustav Mahler's life (1909-11) were spent conducting the New York Philharmonic, the only orchestra Mahler ever led as Music Director. Though a relatively short period of time it was a seminal moment for the composer/conductor, the New York Philharmonic, and music in the United States. During this time the orchestra changed its management structure, handing the leadership from the musicians to a board led by two women, Mary Seney Sheldon and Minnie Untermeyer. Under their management and Mahler's baton the Philharmonic more than doubled its concerts per season and began extensive touring. Concurrently, Mahler's life was cut short due to a heart condition. He ceased conducting halfway through his second season in February, 1911, and died a few months thereafter in Vienna. The Philharmonic's Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives, archives.nyphil.org, is an online resource freely available to anyone worldwide. It includes Mahler's New York programs, correspondence, press coverage, marked scores and orchestral parts.



Bio: Director of Archives and Exhibitions for the New York Philharmonic, where he has worked since 2009. He has curated over 30 exhibits for the Orchestra at David Geffen Hall, including two on Gustav Mahler. He has lectured about the New York Philharmonic's history for audiences at Princeton, Juilliard, New York University, and around Lincoln Center as well as at conferences such as the Society of American Archivists. He has written articles for Playbill magazine, Sony Masterworks, SAA's Performance!, and regularly contributes to the Philharmonic's weekly programs. In October, 2021, he joined the Juilliard School Extension Faculty teaching a course on Mahler's New York. Mr. Smith received his Master's in Archival training and history from New York University.