

Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* occupies a unique place in his output, standing at the threshold between song and symphony and revealing, in concentrated form, many of the emotional and musical ideas that would later unfold on a larger canvas. Written in the mid-1880s, the cycle sets four poems that chart the inner life of a rejected lover, moving from outward simplicity to inward desolation. Folk-like melodies, direct rhythms and a deceptively transparent orchestral texture combine to create music that appears artless on the surface, yet is tightly controlled and deeply expressive beneath.

In this recording, which was omitted from Warner's Boult Mono box, Blanche Thebom brings a warmly centred mezzo-soprano voice to the cycle, shaping Mahler's long melodic lines with poise and restraint. Her singing avoids operatic display in favour of clear diction and an inward, narrative tone, allowing the emotional trajectory of the songs to unfold naturally. Sir Adrian Boult's accompaniment is notable for its balance and clarity. Rather than treating the orchestra as a purely supportive backdrop, he draws out Mahler's subtle instrumental commentary, ensuring that voice and orchestra exist in a finely judged partnership. The result is a reading that highlights the cycle's lyrical intimacy while maintaining a strong sense of structural continuity across the four songs.

The close relationship between *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and the First Symphony has long been recognised. Themes from the songs appear directly in the symphony, most notably in the first movement and the Funeral March, while the emotional world of the cycle — youthful optimism, irony, grief and eventual resignation — permeates the larger work. Hearing the songs alongside the symphony restores this connection in a way that Mahler himself would have understood, revealing the symphony not as an abstract orchestral statement but as an expansion of the same personal narrative.

Boult's approach to the First Symphony is distinctive and, at the time of its release, stood apart from prevailing expectations. He was never regarded as a specialist Mahler conductor, and his interpretation resists many of the rhetorical gestures that later became associated with the composer's music. Instead, Boult treats the symphony as a rigorously structured work, emphasising forward motion, clarity of texture and careful control of tempo relationships. Transitions are handled with particular skill, giving the impression of a continuous, purposeful flow rather than a sequence of episodic contrasts.

In the opening movement, Boult allows the music to unfold with an unforced naturalness, the pastoral elements emerging without exaggeration. The driving *allegro* passages are energetic and alert, yet never indulgent, maintaining tension through momentum rather than weight. The Ländler-based Scherzo is robust and earthy, its dance rhythms firmly articulated, while the Trio avoids sentimentality, keeping the line moving even at moments of apparent repose. In the Funeral March, Boult resists overt grotesquerie, presenting the parody with a straight-faced gravity that underscores its darker implications. The finale, taken at a purposeful pace, builds excitement through cumulative energy rather than sheer volume, bringing the work to a conclusion that is exultant without bombast.

This interpretation inevitably challenged listeners accustomed to more overtly "Mahlerian" readings, and early reactions reflected that unease. With the passage of time, however, Boult's refusal to overstate the music has come to sound increasingly persuasive. Heard today, his Mahler emerges as lean, direct and unsentimental, allowing the composer's ideas to speak without adornment. The stereo recording, made at a time when such presentation was still a novelty, enhances this impression, offering clarity of orchestral detail and a sense of space that serves Boult's architectural view of the score.

Taken together, the songs and the symphony reveal a consistent artistic outlook. In both, Boult favours balance over excess, structure over rhetoric, and musical honesty over theatrical display. The *Wayfarer* songs introduce Mahler's world in miniature; the First Symphony expands it to symphonic scale.

Heard in the context of Boult's complete Mahler discography, which amounts to only a handful of surviving documents, including several accounts of *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, a *Kindertotenlieder*, and a small number of symphonic performances preserved from live broadcasts earlier in his career [Pristine PASC 709], this restraint appears not as limitation but as conviction. Boult approached Mahler selectively and on his own terms, bringing to the music the same disciplined clarity he applied throughout his repertoire.

Presented side by side, these performances offer a compelling portrait of a conductor whose Mahler may once have seemed unconventional, but whose integrity and musical insight continue to reward attentive listening.



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boult
conducts mahler

symphony no. 1
songs of a wayfarer

blanche thebom, mezzo-soprano
london philharmonic orchestra

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MAHLER SONGS OF A WAYFARER - SYMPHONY No. 1
THEBOM, LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, BOULT

boult

conducts mahler

MAHLER Songs of a Wayfarer (*Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*)

1. Wenn mein Schatz Hochzeit macht (3:34)
2. Ging heut' Morgen über's Feld (4:06)
3. Ich hab' ein glühend Messer (3:03)
4. Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz (4:49)

Recorded in mono, 17-18 July 1950, Abbey Road Studio No. 1 - Matrices: 2EA 14912/5
First issued HMV DB 21224/5 (78 rpm) and RCA Victor LM-1203 (LP)

Blanche Thebom, mezzo-soprano

MAHLER Symphony No. 1 in D major

5. 1st mvt. - Langsam, schleppend - Wie ein Naturlaut (14:32)
6. 2nd mvt. - Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell (5:54)
7. 3rd mvt. - Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen (9:05)
8. 4th mvt. - Stürmisch bewegt (16:55)

Recorded in stereo, 10-13 August 1958, Walthamstow Assembly Hall, London
First issued as Everest SDBR-3005

London Philharmonic Orchestra
Sir Adrian Boult, conductor

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MAHLER SONGS OF A WAYFARER - SYMPHONY No. 1
THEBOM, LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA, BOULT



Songs of a Wayfarer
Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Symphony No. 1
XR Remastered by Andrew Rose

Total duration: 61:58

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