

Paper 1

Architect Keith James Clarke looks at Gustav Mahler, places he loved and his inspiration...

Lovers of Mahler's music are drawn to it for a variety of reasons, but they have one thing in common — they remember the first time they were touched by his music. In 1974 I began listening to recordings of his symphonies. The first live concert that I attended was sufficient to convince me of Mahler's exceptional talents. I was stunned by the music's extraordinary orchestral sound, moments of spiritual evocation and intense drama. I needed to find out more about Mahler, so I began listening to his songs and reading about his life in an attempt to account for his genius.

At this time I was an undergraduate student of architecture, which seemed a world away from Mahler's music and the emotions they evoked. My fellow students began spotting books on Mahler symphonies concealed beneath my lecture notes! Much later, I began to identify areas that I wanted to study further.

To begin with, I was struck by Mahler's contribution to the Vienna Secessionist movement. But I was not the right person to address these issues: an art historian would be better placed. Besides I felt there was a bigger story to be told — a story that would call on my emerging understanding of architecture.

So I began to consider buildings — places and spaces — that seemed important to him, special locations that supported him in his life and work. I was driven on by something Winston Churchill said during a parliamentary speech in 1943: "We shape buildings; thereafter buildings shape us". But it's not simply buildings that have a determining effect on our lives — the spaces between buildings are important too. In fact our lives are framed by a host of influences, including geographical, contextual, aural, visual, environmental, cultural and, not least, architectural. These forces help define who we are. Put simply, buildings and their surroundings are part of our biography.

But which buildings — and places and spaces — were important to Mahler? My investigation was now taking on a distinctive character, embracing architectural principles and applying them to Mahler's life and music — a subject conspicuous by its absence. I was also attending some thought-provoking meetings with key players from the world of Mahler scholarship. Standing inside the Foyer of the Royal College of Music in London I was introduced to a group of musicologists as 'an architect carrying out a study into Gustav Mahler'. The silence was deafening. (I surmised their thoughts. How can an architect study a composer? What's the point?) It was precisely because I was approaching this subject from a new direction — a new viewpoint, outside the usual historical and musicological perspective — that I felt I had something *new* to say. My study was different from anything I had read, and it focused on two crucial elements of my life: my fascination for architecture and my love of Mahler's music.

I embarked on extensive trips to European libraries, carrying out site surveys and creating architectural drawings depicting key periods during Mahler's life. I was also questioning assumptions about Mahler, his ways of working — the routes of his inspiration and the relationship between 'place' and his music. Soon I was considering how best to present my new ideas. Gradually, the Mahler's Heavenly Retreats project evolved to include live recordings of the sounds Mahler would have heard, building-in-use studies and films of crucial landmarks. My passion for this subject took the project beyond my wildest expectations.

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The book, DVD and CD is available for purchase for £20.00, (includes postage and packing). Cheque addressed to K J Clarke.

Book: Mahler's Heavenly Retreats: Encounters with the master's 'Composing Houses'

DVD: Landmarks, sites and sounds... (37 minutes)

CD: Spaces, places and associations... (57 minutes)

For details see www.mahlersheavenlyretreats.com

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Architect Keith James Clarke is a specialist in buildings and the importance of the 'character of place'. In his book, DVD and CD he applies this know-how to Mahler's life and music. Keith lectures in architecture at Central Saint Martins, Chelsea College of Art and Design and is Project Director of Mahler's Heavenly Retreats.

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