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Mahler and Humour

International Conference

July 17-19 2025
Grand Hotel Toblach/Dobbiaco
Spiegelsaal

Gustav Mahler Research Centre Innsbruck-Toblach

Thanks to the support of:
Euregio-Kulturzentrum Gustav Mahler Toblach-Dolomiten Foundation
Grand Hotel Toblach
University of Innsbruck, Department of Music

Organisers: Anna Stoll Knecht and Alice Verti

Conference committee: Anna Stoll Knecht (University of Fribourg), Alice Verti (University of Innsbruck), Morten Solvik (Mahler Foundation), Lóránt Péteri (Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music)

17 July

9:00-9:15	**Anna Stoll Knecht and Alice Verti**: Welcome
	Keynote 1
9:15-10:15	**Christine Lubkoll-Klotz** **(University of Erlangen-Nuremberg)** Nachahmung – Kontrastierung – Travestie. Lachtheoretische Vorüberlegungen zum Humor
10:15-10:30	Coffee break
	Session 1: Musical Humour and Literary Theories (Chair: Christian Utz)
10:30-11:15	**Christian Glanz (University of Music and Performing Arts, Vienna)** Mahler's 'Humoreske' in the context of 'Menippean' satire
11:15-12:00	**Renate Stark-Voit (International Gustav Mahler Society)** Spielarten des Mahlerschen Humors – Facetten in einem Kaleidoskop
12:00-13:30	Lunch break

17 July

	Session 2: The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies: Of Irony and Animals (Chair: Lóránt Péteri)
13:30-14:15	**Alice Verti (University of Innsbruck)** 'Vorwiegend heiteren Charakters', 'humoristischen Inhalts': the Peculiar Irony of the Seventh Symphony
14:15-15:00	**Julian Caskel (Folkwang University of the Arts)** The theory and analysis of metrical consonances and dissonances: A humorous Mahlerian update
15:00-15:15	Coffee break
15:15-16:00	**Thomas Peattie (University of Mississippi)** 'What the Animals in the Zoo Tell Me': Mahler's Domesticated Nature
16:00-16:45	**Nicolas Waldvogel (University of the Pacific)** Mahler, Cuckoos and Donkeys

18 July

	Keynote 2
9:00-10:00	**Federico Celestini (University of Innsbruck)** From Haydn to Mahler and back again. The 'unshackled masters' of musical humour
	Session 3: Constructed and unintentional laughter in Mahler's music (Chair: Thomas Peattie)
10:00-10:45	**Jeremy Barham (University of Surrey)** 'First as Tragedy, then as Farce': Mahler's Sternean Punchlines
10:45-11:00	Coffee break
11:00-11:45	**Brent Wetters (Clark University)** Nobody Expects the Comically-Large Hammer: Mahler, Hardy, and the Unintentionally Humorous
11:45-12:30	**Eric Smialek (University of Huddersfield)** Orchestrating the 'Inverted Sublime': Contrasting Settings of Humour in Mahler's *Wunderhorn* Symphonies
12:30-14:15	Lunch break

18 July

Session 4: Irony and Caricature in Form and Reception (Chair: Anna Ficarella)

14:15-15:00 **Oana Andreica (Gheorghe Dima National Academy of Music)**

‘Humour’ Censored? On Mahler’s Reception in Communist Romania

15:00-15:45 **Milijana Pavlović (University of Innsbruck)**

Funny, but to whom? The musical othering of Jews and its long shadow over the Mahler reception

15:45-16:00 Coffee break

16:00-16:45 **Michael Mitchell (Durham University)**

Formal Characters and Caricatures in the Opening of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony

16:45-17:30 **Justin Gregg (Columbia University)**

Caricatures of the Concertgebouw: Satirical Cartoons on the 1920 Amsterdam Mahler Festival

Conference dinner at Hans Pizzeria Restaurant, via Pusteria 9, Toblach, 8:30 p.m.

19 July

Session 5: Facets of humour in the *Wunderhorn* symphonies (Chair: Jeremy Barham)

9:00-9:45 **Morten Solvik (Mahler Foundation)**

Mahler's 'Humorous' Third Symphony

9:45-10:30 **Christian Utz (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz)**

Performing the Comic, the Grotesque, the Serious, and the Tragic in Recordings of the Vocal Movements of Mahler's Third Symphony

10:30-10:45 Coffee break

10:45-11:30 **Maho Naito (University of Bonn)**

Strategien der Verfremdung in der Ersten Symphonie Mahlers

11:30-12:15 **Lóránt Péteri (Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music)**

Nostalgia and Humour – Musico-Cinematic Intertextuality in István Szabó's *Father*

Concluding thoughts, end of the conference.

Abstracts and biographies

Christine Lubkoll-Klotz (University of Nuremberg-Erlangen)

Keynote: Nachahmung – Kontrastierung – Travestie. Lachtheoretische Vorüberlegungen zum Humor

Über die Frage, warum wir lachen, wird in der Philosophie seit der Antike nachgedacht; in den Künsten – namentlich in der Literatur, aber auch in der Musik – wurden Rhetoriken und ästhetische Strategien des Lachens erprobt und mitunter zum Programm erhoben. Der Vortrag erörtert im Vorfeld der Auseinandersetzung mit Mahlers Humor einschlägige Lachtheorien von Aristoteles (Kontrastthese) über Hobbes (Hierarchiemodell) und die Romantik (Ironie als Erkenntnisform) bis zu Freud und Bergson (letztere als besonders wichtige Zeitgenossen Mahlers und Vertreter einer sozialpsychologischen Erklärung). Dabei soll vor allem das Verständnis für die ästhetischen Realisationsformen des Lachens und ihre Funktionen bestimmt werden: Groteske, Karikatur, Satire. Den Abschluss bildet auf dieser Basis ein kurzer (dilettantischer) Versuch der Literaturwissenschaftlerin, mögliche Erscheinungsformen eines musikalischen Humors zu typologisieren.

Prof. Dr. **Christine Lubkoll-Klotz** ist Germanistin und Hochschullehrerin. Sie studierte Germanistik, Geschichte und französische Literatur in Freiburg und Bordeaux (1975–1982) und promovierte 1985 in Freiburg. Nach ihrer Habilitation 1993 an der LMU München folgte sie 1995–2001 einem Ruf als Professorin für Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft an der Universität Gießen, wo sie auch Sprecherin eines DFG-Graduiertenkollegs zu Klassizismus und Romantik war. Seit 2002 bekleidet sie den Lehrstuhl für Neuere deutsche Literatur mit historischem Schwerpunkt an der Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg. Lubkolls Forschung umfasst Kultur- und Literaturgeschichte des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts, Klassizismus, Romantik, ästhetische Moderne, Thematologie, Mythenforschung, Ethik, Erzähltheorie und Literatur-Musik-Beziehungen.

Christian Glanz (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna)

Paper: Mahler’s ‘Humoreske’ in the context of ‘Menippean’ satire

My paper deals with the question of the extent to which ‘Menippean satire’ can be meaningful as a reading of humorous and satirical aspects in Mahler's music. In connection with Mikhail Bakhtin's categories of the carnivalesque and heteroglossia, which play a central role in his study of Rabelais, the historical reference to the type of satire, named after the late antique Cynic Menippos and initially found primarily in the work of Lucian, appears several times. Bakhtin and other authors also repeatedly refer to the relevance of ‘Menippean satire’ with regard to later literature (alongside Rabelais, for example, Cervantes, Sterne, Voltaire, and Jean Paul). However, it cannot be concealed that this category is also viewed critically in aesthetic theory. Considering Mahler's well-known intensive preoccupation with literature and philosophy, it seems obvious and legitimate to relate this context to the multi-layered complex of ‘humor’ in his work. The paper will use Mahler's Fourth Symphony (especially its first movement) to discuss which aspects of this symphonic ‘humoresque’ (Mahler) can be addressed on the basis of this literary-historical question. Schopenhauer's polemical criticism of a ‘Jetztzeit’ will also play a role, the tone of which can at least indirectly be linked to characteristics of ‘Menippean satire’.

Christian Glanz, PhD Karl Franzens University Graz (musicology), habilitation in historical musicology; currently Associate Professor of Historical Musicology at the MdW (University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna), where he is also head of the research center ‘Gustav Mahler and Viennese Modernism’; main focus: music and politics, Gustav Mahler, Hanns Eisler.

Renate Stark-Voit (International Gustav Mahler Society)

Paper: Spielarten des Mahlerschen Humors – Facetten in einem Kaleidoskop

Sein Humor sei „naiv etc.", und sei dasjenige an seinem Wesen, „was jedenfalls in alle Zukunft nur die Wenigsten erfassen werden", so portraitiert sich Mahler im Dezember 1901 in einem der ersten Briefe an seine zukünftige Braut Alma Maria Schindler. Die Herausforderung nehmen wir bei diesem Symposium an und setzen uns damit neuerlich auseinander. Denn was Mahler jeweils unter dem Begriff Humor verstand, den er so exklusiv für sich reklamierte, ist Gegenstand vielfältiger Untersuchungen geworden mit dem jeweiligen Ziel, Mahlers Humor in seiner Musik ›dingfest‹ zu machen – sei es in formaler, stilistischer oder ästhetischer Hinsicht.

Meine Annäherung an das Begriffsfeld und die Geisteshaltung geht hier hingegen von der sprachlichen (und sprachgeschichtlichen) Seite aus, sowie durchaus auch von Beobachtungen zu Mahlers Umgangston im Alltag, soweit er überliefert ist. Eine Zusammenschau seiner auffallend zahlreichen ‚humoristischen' Vortrags-bezeichnungen in den Wunderhornliedern und den vier ‚*Wunderhorn*-Symphonien' ergibt Facetten, für die immer wieder neue Erklärungen gesucht werden können. Bislang unveröffentlichte Dokumente bestätigen zudem Mahlers Verwendung von Humoreske als ‚Etikett' für sein Genre, das eben einem Kaleidoskop gleichkommt, sowie den von ihm adaptierten Gattungsbegriff.

Renate Stark-Voit ist Musikwissenschaftlerin und Germanistin, Vorstandsmitglied der Internationalen Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft (IGMG) Wien und Herausgeberin in der Neuen Kritischen Gesamtausgabe (NKG) der Werke Gustav Mahlers: *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, Zweite Symphonie, Vierte Symphonie, Erste Symphonie (in Vorbereitung), ferner Mitarbeit an *Titan* und *Das Lied von der Erde* als ex aequo-Editionsleiterin mit Stephen E. Hefling. Redakteurin der „Nachrichten zur Mahlerforschung / News about Mahler Research".

Alice Verti (University of Innsbruck)

Paper: 'Vorwiegend heiteren Charakters', 'humoristischen Inhalts': the Peculiar Irony of the Seventh Symphony

Infamous and misunderstood for its ambivalence and contradictions, the Seventh Symphony has been openly suspected of being an 'ironic' text only since the 1990s, but a closer look to the history of its reception reveals how such hypothesis has been developing relentlessly ever since its premiere. In unique contrast to previous works, the Seventh's irony shall not be investigated in terms of 'Humor' as much as self-reflection, a poetic attitude that mirrors the symphony's position between late Romanticism and early Modernism. This contribution aims to delve into the specificities of such irony through key contributions to its reception and the analysis of particular features of the musical text.

For **Alice Verti's biography see end of booklet.**

Julian Caskel (Folkwang University of the Arts)

Paper: The theory and analysis of metrical consonances and dissonances:
A humorous Mahlerian update

Humor appears in Gustav Mahler's symphonies as an aesthetic premise that can be related to the overarching work-concept, but also in the form of identifiable compositional details. Thus, it seems promising to examine whether prevalent concepts of music theory can be transferred to the analysis of precisely these humoristic intentions in Mahler.
1) The theory of metrical dissonances – established by Harald Krebs – is based on distinctions between 'grouping' and 'displacement' types and 'tight' and 'loose' appearances of dissonance. The Scherzo of the Sixth Symphony, in its Trio titled 'Altväterisch', puts these concepts to the test: permanent changes of the notated meter do not only create non-isochronous groups, but additional weak beats that show a generic conflict between (upbeat-oriented) dance and (downbeat-

demarcated) march. ‘Exaggeration’ theories of musical humor could describe the intended effect: The resulting metrical dissonances seem particularly ‘tight’, but actually are particularly ‘loose’.
2) A presupposition of metrical accentuation is a balancing between ‘phenomenal’ and ‘structural’ accents (see Lerdahl / Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*): A structurally strong beat requires only a small amount of phenomenal accentuation, whereas a structurally weak beat can only be profiled through such phenomenal support. The Scherzo of Mahler’s Seventh Symphony can be analyzed as a parody of this principle: Metrical ‘consonances’ are emphasized in an increasingly grotesque manner by extremely strong phenomenal emphasis. In terms of humor theories of inversion, this could be described as a conscious switch that treats downbeats as markers of instability. Finally, and with reference to Peter Petersen's model of the ‘rhythm score’ (‘Rhythmuspartitur’), it can be discussed to what extent a humorous approach to musical meter, as in the above-mentioned and other examples by Mahler, could be generalized as an analytical toolkit.

Julian Caskel studied musicology, philosophy and political science at the universities of Heidelberg and Cologne. Doctorate in 2008 with a thesis on scherzo movements in the 19th century, habilitation in 2017. Substitute professorships at the HFMT Cologne, the Goethe University Frankfurt, the CAU Kiel and the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen. Publications on empirical performance studies (including *Handbuch Dirigenten*, together with Hartmut Hein), on music theory and music aesthetics (including *Die Theorie des Rhythmus*) as well as on music history from Haydn to the present. Research and teaching also in the area of systematic musicology, currently on the topic of ‘Music and Climate Change’ and the publication *Softwaregestützte Interpretationsforschung*.

Thomas Peattie (University of Mississippi)

Paper: What the Animals in the Zoo Tell Me: Mahler's Domesticated Nature

From the cuckoo calls in the opening measures of the First Symphony to the braying donkey in 'Lob des hohen Verstandes', the voices of non-human animals that populate Gustav Mahler's songs and symphonies have largely been tamed, their wildness held in check by the composer's ambivalent engagement with the long history of musical illustration. Indeed, the stylized nature of these voices often suggests an ironic distance from the very notion of composed biophonic sound, and on occasion even takes on the character of a prototypically Haydnesque 'joke'. In this paper I consider Mahler's attitude toward the representation of non-human voices against the backdrop of Beethoven's critical engagement with the eighteenth-century genre of the characteristic symphony in his own Sixth Symphony (1808), a work in which the named bird calls in the second movement stand in playful opposition to Beethoven's claim that his symphony is 'more the expression of feeling than tone-painting'. In the case of Mahler, the composer's ambivalence toward this illustrative tradition runs even deeper. This is particularly evident in the second movement of the Seventh Symphony (1904–05) where the 'Vogelstimmen' in the movement's concluding measures also resemble a typically Mahlerian perpetuum mobile associated by Adorno (by way of Hegel) with the aimless 'course of the world' (Weltlauf). This bitter irony is only heightened in the subsequent Scherzo when the thread of the movement's perpetuum mobile is shattered by a grotesque cry (marked *kreischend*) whose origins can be traced to an unexpected array of biophonic and anthropogenic sources.

Thomas Peattie is an Associate Professor of Music at the University of Mississippi. He holds degrees in composition and musicology from the University of Calgary and a Ph.D. in historical musicology from Harvard University. He is the recipient of fellowships from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Paul Sacher Foundation (Basel), and the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University. His essays have appeared in *Mahler and his World* (Princeton), *Music, Modern Culture, and the Critical Ear* (Routledge), *Giacinto Scelsi: Music Across the Borders* (Brepols), *Mahler in Context* (Cambridge), and *The*

Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism. His articles and reviews have appeared in *Acta musicologica*, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, *Music and Letters*, *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, and *Contemporary Music Review*. He is the author of *Gustav Mahler's Symphonic Landscapes* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Nicolas Waldvogel (University of the Pacific)

Paper: Mahler, Cuckoos and Donkeys

In June 1896, a few months after his First Symphony had been panned by the press, Mahler wrote a *Wunderhorn* song entitled 'In Praise of the Critic'. It depicts a contest between a nightingale and a cuckoo, adjudicated by a donkey. To the original *Wunderhorn* text, Mahler added a 'Yeehaw'. He also set it to a striking octave leap identical to the one that concludes his First Symphony. At one level, Mahler mocks the critics of his First Symphony. At another, he emulates what Nietzsche describes as the need for cathartic laughter after a moment of great significance. In the symphony, the cuckoo sings from tonic to dominant throughout, but from tonic to tonic at the very end; in the *Wunderhorn* song, the stunning octave gesture becomes a 'Yeehaw'.

Mahler published the song in 1899 with a new title, 'In Praise of High Intellect'. In the Summer of 1892, while finishing the Fifth Symphony, he used some of its themes again. In the transition that follows the Adagietto, Mahler brought back the nightingale, cuckoo, and donkey, with all kinds of performance directives to the wind instruments. Their playful interaction becomes the foundation of the Finale, in which the Adagietto theme is gently mocked. The donkey music, on the other hand, becomes a very serious matter. The implications for performance are complex, since the same themes are used with apparently different meanings.

Dr. **Nicolas Waldvogel** is Professor of Music at the University of the Pacific, Conservatory of Music. He has guest conducted the Orchestra de la Suisse Romande

(Switzerland) and the State Philharmonic 'Dinu Lipatti' (Romania). He was a Conducting Fellow at the Tanglewood Festival, where he studied with Gustav Meier, Seiji Ozawa, and John Nelson. He also assisted Horst Stein in a production of Wagner's *Der Ring der Nibelungen* at the Deutsche Oper, in Berlin. He has performed with Yo-Yo Ma, with Anonymous 4, and with Alan Gilbert. His credits include a performance of Ives's immense Fourth Symphony, Verdi's *La Traviata*, Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, Bruckner's Ninth Symphony and the complete symphonies by Jean Sibelius. He is the author of the 'Symphony' article in *Oxford Bibliographies Online*.

Federico Celestini (University of Innsbruck)

Keynote: From Haydn to Mahler and back again. The 'unshackled masters' of musical humour

In 18th-century English novels, particularly those by Henry Fielding, Tobias Smollett, and Laurence Sterne, a humorous style of writing emerged which, in the course of its reception, became a subject of aesthetic reflection on the part of German philosophers, writers, and music aestheticians. The conceptual development of musical humor can thus be attributed to a double transfer, on the one hand between the English and German-speaking cultural spheres and on the other between literature and music. In this context, musical humor underwent a significant revaluation, for which Haydn can be identified as one of the key protagonists. The paper will examine the extent to which Gustav Mahler refers not only to the early Romantic conception of humor, but also to Haydn himself.

Federico Celestini is Professor for Musicology at the University of Innsbruck. He studied in Rome at La Sapienza University before completing his Ph.D. and Habilitation in Musicology at the Karl Franzens University in Graz, Austria. Celestini has been awarded several fellowships and guest professorships, e.g. from the British Academy (University of Oxford), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Freie Universität Berlin) and the Mellon Foundation (University of Chicago). Celestini is

Director of the Gustav Mahler Research Centre in Dobbiaco and a member of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. His publications include books on Haydn's Piano Sonatas, on Viennese Modernism, on Giacinto Scelsi and on Nietzsche's music philosophy.

Jeremy Barham (University of Surrey)

Paper: 'First as Tragedy, then as Farce': Mahler's Sternean Punchlines

The influence of Anglo-Irish novelist Laurence Sterne (1713–68) on later traditions of romantic irony has been acknowledged. But his importance for Austrian and German music is less well understood. Mahler's enthusiasm for the humour in Sterne's magnum opus *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67), reported by Bruno Walter, places him at the end of a long line of musico-literary intersections with the writer that can be traced back to C.P.E. Bach and Haydn, through to Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Brahms, Wagner, and Wolf. The filtering of Sterne's literary approaches through some of Mahler's favoured 19th-century ironists and satirists (Jean Paul, Tieck, Fechner) is historically significant.

Sterne's radical comedic deployment of, for example, narrative digression, interruption, metalepsis, Illusionsstörung, and conceptual inversion has particularly strong resonance with Mahler's subversive musical idiolect. Both share a preoccupation with self-referentiality, using convention against itself, and for intrusive gestures that undermine hermetic systems. Examples from texted and non-texted works demonstrate Mahler's small- and large-scale manipulation of material in Sterne-like musical puns, comic incongruities, and narrative games. The seriousness of Mahler's humour is assessed.

Jeremy Barham is Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of Surrey, UK, where he is also Director of the Institute of Austrian and German Music Research (https://iagmr.org/). He has published widely on the music and culture of Gustav Mahler (most recently as guest editor and writer for an issue of *19th-Century Music* (2024)

on Mahler, sex, and gender), as well as on screen music (editor and contributor for The *Routledge Companion to Global Film Music in the Early Sound Era*, 2024). In 2021 he was a runner-up in the *New Grove* spoof article competition.

Brent Wetters (Clark University)

Paper: Nobody Expects the Comically-Large Hammer: Mahler, Hardy, and the Unintentionally Humorous

The Sixth Symphony, subtitled the 'Tragic', might seem an odd place to find humor in the music of Mahler, especially the 'hammer blows' where fate conquers the symphony's hero. Yet performances of the Sixth often veer into the comic when the hammer is revealed, its sound sometimes comically underwhelming. The humor of these moments, however, is not limited to visual and auditory incongruities. I find a peculiar sort of comedy in the Sixth Symphony and the novels of his contemporary, Thomas Hardy. Despite limited evidence of mutual knowledge, fate asserts itself as a determining force over their works' subjects—the 'hero' of Mahler; Tess or Jude of their eponymous novels. Both artists take seriously the world-building aspects of their compositions, but therefore also become God in their created universes. Humor intrudes precisely when each tries to pass off their own will as 'fate'. Following Bergson, the darkest moments of Jude are unintentionally funny because the protagonist behaves in a mechanical way; we see the puppet-strings controlling the situation and instinctively laugh (or gasp) at the audacity of Hardy's cruelty. Mahler too provokes humor at precisely those moments when his intent is most serious. He leads the listener to believe the Sixth might conclude with a glorious triumph (as in the Fifth), only to pull the proverbial rug at the last moment. The hammer blows (being both musical sound and sound effect) are darkly funny because they crack a 'fourth wall' and implicate author, performer, and listener in the unfolding tragedy.

Brent Wetters is Adjunct Professor of Music at Clark University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, and Providence College. He holds degrees in composition from University of Michigan, the Ghent Conservatory, and Wesleyan University. He received a doctorate in musicology from Brown (2012), where he completed a dissertation on the Darmstadt Summer Courses titled 'Darmstadt and the Philosophical Turn'. His recent work has focused on a variety of topics, from Paul Celan's use of Franz Schubert's *Winterreise* to Gustav Mahler and his bicycle. His first book, co-edited with Anthony Cushing, *Matter of North: Essays on Glenn Gould and the Idea of North* has just been published by SUNY Press (July 2025).

Eric Smialek (University of Huddersfield)

Paper: Orchestrating the 'Inverted Sublime': Contrasting Settings of Humour in Mahler's *Wunderhorn* Symphonies

Mahler's *Wunderhorn* symphonies offer multiple exemplars of humour-fueled creativity. Their score markings, such as 'mit Humor', and Mahler's comments about humour in them to Bruno Walter and Natalie Bauer-Lechner create a strong foundation for extrapolating insights about his expressive resources. Although other writings explore the humorous dimensions of stylistic quotation, sudden juxtapositions, and irreverent mixing of the sacred and profane (e.g. Johnson 2009, Batstone 2020), opportunities remain to venture deeper into the role of orchestration in Mahler's humour. Beyond novel timbres, what humorous worlds did Mahler craft with orchestral blends and combinations? How do they play with music cognition to craft surprise? Stephen McAdams and colleagues' Taxonomy of Orchestral Grouping Effects (TOGE) (McAdams et al, 2022) offers a rich, perceptual lens for exploring such questions.

My presentation uses the perceptual groupings in TOGE to analyze orchestration in three humorous juxtapositions: 1) The Second Symphony's 'Fischpredigt' vs brass chorale, 2) the abrupt contrasts in 'Das himmlische Leben' within Mahler's Fourth, and 3) the Scherzo of the Third's 'Panic humour' (Johnson 2009, 125) vs the noble posthorn solo. In different ways, Mahler contrasts timbral heterogeneity with

blending, influencing the perception of melodic contours, phrases, and themes (Goodchild and McAdams 2021). Using OrchView software, I explicate different perceptual groupings that enliven Mahler's humour. Closely examining meaningful juxtapositions in Mahler's orchestration through the TOGE framework provides cognitive insights into Mahler's creativity and individual style.

Eric Smialek is a popular music scholar and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Huddersfield where he researches expression, technique, and cultural meaning in extreme metal vocals. He recently published an article on metal genre-taxonomies in the journal *Volume!* and chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Metal Music*, *Heavy Metal Music and Disability*, and *Musical Scenes and Social Class*. His further specialization on Taylor Swift includes an article on LGBTQ allyship in *Contemporary Music Review*, co-founding the European Taylor Swift Research Network, and co-organization of the 2024 Taylor Swift unconference in Amsterdam. As a long devotee of Mahler's music, he is now pursuing a long wish to contribute to Mahler studies. He serves on the editorial advisory board for the journal *Metal Music Studies* and as Assistant Editor for IASPM Journal.

Oana Andreica (**Gheorghe Dima National Academy of Music Cluj-Napoca)**

Paper: 'Humour' Censored? On Mahler's Reception in Communist Romania

A search in the Romanian concert programs between 1947 and 1989 reveals Mahler as one of the regularly performed composers, with every season of the leading orchestras in Bucharest, Cluj and Iaşi featuring his works. Symphonies No. 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9, but also *Songs of a Wayfarer* and *Song of the Earth* seem to have been the favourite choices. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that numerous written accounts of these public concerts are to be found in various newspapers. However, the humorous side of Mahler's music receives few to no remarks. On the contrary, sometimes he is described as a lonely genius, pioneer of modernity, whose destiny was to fight the Austro-Hungarian decadent aristocracy and impose his art through

what was praised as the reinterpretation of childhood innocence and purity. Other times, he is given as an example of the immense talent caught in the trap of capitalist tendencies. This paper aims at formulating some possible answers to why Romanian authors appear to have completely disregarded a crucial aspect in Mahler's compositional approach, by also looking into how 'humour' was described in officially authorized narratives and what were the accepted ways of artistically conveying it in a totalitarian political environment.

Oana Andreica is an assistant professor of Musicology and Musical Semiotics and head of the Doctoral Studies at the 'Gheorghe Dima' National Academy of Music in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. She regularly participates in national and international conferences and her list of publications comprises studies, articles, interviews and concert reviews, as well as edited collective volumes, the most recent being *Music as Cultural Heritage and Novelty*, released by Springer in September 2022. She published the monograph *Artă şi abis. Cazul Mahler* (*Art and Abyss. The Mahler Case*) in 2012 and *Ghid (incomplet) de concert ([Incomplete] Concert Guide)* in 2021. Currently, her research focuses on topic theory, Romanticism and Romanian contemporary music.

Milijana Pavlović (University of Innsbruck)

Paper: Funny, but to whom? The musical othering of Jews and its long shadow over the Mahler reception

The negative contemporary reception of Mahler's music had various starting points. Among these, some dealt with purely musical issues, trying to categorise Mahler's music through the lens of the greater symphonic context. Others, however, were deeply rooted in the anti-Jewish tradition of Christian Europe, and concentrated on the accusations of triviality, lack of originality, noise and so on. The peak of the attacks on Mahler's music took place during the Nazi era, with Mahler as one of many, but still particularly singled out mostly due to his symphonic opus, a genre so eagerly appropriated as German. The root of this antagonism lies not in Richard

Wagner's pamphlet *Judentum in der Musik*, but in a centuries long tradition of sonic othering of Jews, of which Wagner's text is merely an ideological product. This paper deals with the nature of the 'music libel against the Jews', as Ruth HaCohen called it, and in particular the mocking elements which were supposed to be funny to everyone except their direct target.

Milijana Pavlović is a researcher at the Department of Music at the University of Innsbruck. She obtained her PhD at the University of Ferrara, Italy, with a dissertation on Gustav Mahler. Since 2013 she has worked at the University of Innsbruck. Her present research focusses mainly on music as a means of violence during the Holocaust, as well as anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism in music.

Michael Mitchell (Durham University)

Paper: Formal Characters and Caricatures in the Opening of Mahler's Fourth Symphony

In his discussion of the opening movement of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, Adorno observes that 'everything is composed in quotation marks – because the music says: "Once upon a time, there was a sonata"' (Adorno 1960). This incisive remark encapsulates the archaic, classical style of the movement's themes and formal design while also pointing to the contingency of these same features within Mahler's modernist musical discourse. While the use of historicised thematic material has attracted scholarly attention for presenting an inauthentic or ironic voice (Johnson 2009), there has been less focus on the ironic presentation of archaic formal phenomena. Complex reworkings of traditional formal functions are commonplace across Mahler's symphonies, prompting Adorno to hypothesise a 'material theory of form'. He asserts that the overlaying of material-formal categories like breakthrough, suspension, fulfilment, and collapse 'characterises' traditional forms (Adorno 1960). Once it is clear that a given formal premiss is no longer the totality of musical experience, it is incorporated into the work's broader mise en scène as a character. In this paper, I interrogate this process of characterising historical forms and consider

how, in this movement, both sonata form, ritornello form, and developing variation can be understood as a formal caricatures. I then explore various ironic, tragic, and comic options for hermeneutic readings based on this interpretation, supported by specific cases of parametric non-congruence, rotational over-proliferation and sonata expansion which drive the formal metamorphosis apparent in this movement.

Michael Mitchell is an AHRC-funded PhD candidate at Durham University specialising in music theory. His research focuses on material-formal collapse in *fin-de-siècle* symphonic works and the aesthetics of Theodor W. Adorno.

Justin Gregg (Columbia University)

Paper: Caricatures of the Concertgebouw: Satirical Cartoons on the 1920 Amsterdam Mahler Festival

On 5 June 1920, the left-leaning Dutch newspaper *De Amsterdammer* published a cartoon image of an elderly couple sitting miserably next to one another, staring blankly into the distance. Through a poem accompanying the cartoon, the reader learns that the fictitious couple has recently attended the entirety of the 1920 Mahler Festival held by Amsterdam's Concertgebouw Orchestra under the direction of Willem Mengelberg. The poem conveys the couple's dissatisfaction with the expense and inflated grandiosity of the two-week event, concluding with the man stating that 'I don't get it at all. Either they're idiots, or we are'.

This cartoon and poem contrast with almost all journalistic accounts of the Mahler Festival, which was generally lauded across Europe and North America as a 'peace conference' after the war, and as a major musical achievement by Mengelberg and his orchestra. However, this was not the only instance of journalistic satire aimed at the event. The previous month, *De Amsterdammer* had published another cartoon mocking the adulation of Mengelberg in the leadup to the festivities, and Het Leven

published a series of caricatures lambasting the festival's elitism in response to the Concertgebouw's efforts to cast the event as being accessible to the volk.

In this presentation, I analyze these three instances of journalistic satire aimed at the Amsterdam Mahler Festival, in which humor was used to question the continued relevance of Mahler's music (and a festival like this) in 1920. I put these caricatures in dialogue with the forms of humor encountered in Mahler's music itself, as well as with the changing societal attitudes toward art music in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Justin T. Gregg is a Lecturer in Music at Columbia University in New York, where he received his PhD in Historical Musicology in 2024. In his dissertation, he analyzed the 1920 Amsterdam Mahler Festival not only as a major musical gathering, but also as an event with real political and diplomatic goals shortly after the First World War. He is broadly interested in the reception of Mahler's music throughout the twentieth century, and has presented his work at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society and the first international symposium of the Wissenschaftszentrum Gustav Mahler, among other conferences. In addition to Columbia, he has taught courses in musicology at the University of Hartford and the University of Delaware. He is currently working on a book project examining the use of music to support evolving ideas of democracy in Europe and North America during the interwar period.

Morten Solvik (Mahler Foundation)

Paper: Mahler's 'Humorous' Third Symphony

Referring to the expansive composition he had just finished in 1896, the composer made the observation that almost all of the movements are humorous, 'only two [4 and 6] are deeply serious. […] Few people understand that humor here has to be used only for that which is highest and which cannot be expressed in any other way'.

On first consideration, the description seems at odds with the massive, world-embracing work most listeners associate with this symphony. The article will explore how Mahler may have derived this aesthetic from a number of seemingly diverse sources: the writings of Jean Paul and E. T. A. Hoffmann, Greek mythology, and Friedrich Nietzsche. At its foundation, Mahler's perspective seeks to find a higher ground from which to contemplate the struggles of existence in its various guises, from the inevitability of suffering to the short-sighted foibles of human nature. The composer explored these impulses in the Bacchic celebration of the rush of life, in 'Callot's' penetrating insight into all the 'poor things' we do, in the inversion of the sublime, in the profound laughter of *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*. In a manner typical of Mahler's multivalent thinking, he was able to combine such strands in his creative and interpretive mind, not as a mockery or dismissal of that which is serious, but as a means of overcoming. Attempting to recover the consistencies and contradictions lurking here can provide a framework for added insight in our approach to the Third Symphony.

Morten Solvik is a musicologist and international educator. A native of Norway, he received his education in the US (Cornell and UPenn) before moving to Austria, where he currently resides. Solvik's research focuses on the connections between music and culture, especially with regard to Gustav Mahler. He is active as an author (with chapters in *The Cambridge Companion to Mahler*, *Perspectives on Gustav Mahler*, *Mahler in Context*), book editor (*Mahler im Kontext/Contextualizing Mahler*, *Franz Schubert and His World*), speaker at conferences and public venues, as a contributor, writer, and consultant on productions for radio and television, and as a host and producer of webcasts. Solvik is the co-founder and Artistic Director of the Gustav Mahler Festival in Steinbach am Attersee and Board Director and Vice President of Mahler Foundation. Solvik serves as Dean of Central Europe for IES Abroad Vienna, a study abroad program for US university students.

Christian Utz (University of Music and Performing Arts Graz)

Paper: Performing the Comic, the Grotesque, the Serious, and the Tragic in Recordings of the Vocal Movements of Mahler's Third Symphony

The combination of the tragic and the comic, supplemented by intermediate stages such as the serious and the grotesque, is one of the basic characteristics of Gustav Mahler's music. This is particularly evident in the direct juxtaposition of serious and humorous movement characters, as in the two vocal movements of the Third Symphony (iv and v), as well as in the ambiguity of individual motifs, themes, or passages. It is often unclear whether they are 'meant seriously' or reveal ironic distance, as in the opening theme of the first movement of this symphony. Musical performance can contribute to this ambiguity, enhancing or reducing it through tempo, dynamics, contrast and transitions, text rendering, and various nuances of timbre and expression. Based on these considerations, this presentation will focus on the role of the two vocal movements in various recordings of Mahler's Third Symphony, ranging from Hermann Scherchen's earliest recording with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra in 1950 to Gustavo Dudamel's 2014 recording with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra.

Christian Utz is professor of music theory and music analysis at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz and associate professor at the University of Vienna. He has also been visiting professor at the National Chiao-Tung University (Taiwan) and the University of Tokyo. His monographs include *Neue Musik und Interkulturalität: Von John Cage bis Tan Dun* (Steiner, 2002), *Musical Composition in the Context of Globalization: New Perspectives on Music History of the 20th and 21st Century* (transcript, 2014; 2021), and *Unerhörte Klänge: Zur performativen Analyse und Wahrnehmung posttonaler Musik und ihren historischen Voraussetzungen* (Olms/musiconn, 2023). Utz has been co-editor of the *Zeitschrift der Gesellschaft für Musiktheorie* (ZGMTH, 2015–20) and the *Lexikon Neue Musik* (Metzler/Bärenreiter, 2016). He currently leads an FWF-funded research project on the performance history of Mahler's symphonies. Since 2023 he has been President of the International Gustav Mahler Society.

Maho Naito (University of Bonn)

Paper: Strategien der Verfremdung in der Ersten Symphonie Mahlers

Die Mahlerforschung hat die Instrumentation bislang vorwiegend in Bezug auf den Zusammenhang zwischen Musik und Programm sowie auf die idiomatische, topische und räumliche Verwendung der Instrumente untersucht. Während in der bestehenden Literatur häufig darauf hingewiesen wurde, dass Mahler die Instrumente nicht nur traditionell, sondern auch verfremdet einsetzte, wurden jedoch die weitgehenden Veränderungen der Instrumentation im Überarbeitungsprozess – durch den die verfremdete Klänge geschaffen wurden – sowie der Zweck der Verwendung dieser verfremdeten Klänge bislang nur unzureichend diskutiert.
Das Referat befasst sich daher mit den Strategien der Verfremdung bei Mahler anhand eines Vergleichs der entstehungsgeschichtlichen Quellen der Ersten Symphonie. Die Erste Symphonie ist ein besonders ertragreiches Beispiel, da sie nicht nur häufig im Kontext der Verfremdung thematisiert wurde, sondern auch die Instrumentation in verschiedenen Arbeitsphasen deutlich geändert wurde. Dieser Veränderungsprozess lässt sich anhand von Autographen, Kopistenabschriften sowie Stichvorlage nachvollziehen und offenbart Strategien der Verfremdung Mahlers, die durch instrumentale Änderungen gestützt werden. Durch die Kombination musikanalytischer und quellenphilologischer Methoden, können die Genese und Intention von Mahlers Instrumentationsstrategien präziser erfasst werden: Im ersten Satz erscheinen verfremdete Klänge als Denaturierung, im dritten Satz dienen sie der Schaffung ästhetischer Distanz, und im vierten Satz übernehmen sie eine strukturelle Funktion. Ich möchte zeigen, dass Mahler die traditionelle Instrumentation nicht von Anfang an, sondern schrittweise verfremdete, um den Klang mit neuen Funktionen zu versehen und neuartige Klangwirkungen zu erzielen.

Maho Naito ist Doktorandin im siebten Jahr an der Rheinischen Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn. Von 2011 bis 2015 absolvierte sie ein Bachelorstudium der Musikwissenschaft an der Toho-Gakuen-Universität für Musik in Tokyo. Anschließend erwarb sie von 2015 bis 2017 ihren Masterabschluss in Musikwissenschaft an der Tokyo University of the Arts. Seit Herbst 2018 promoviert sie im Fach Musikwissenschaft/Sound Studies an der Universität Bonn mit einem

Forschungsprojekt zur „Instrumentation der frühen Symphonien Gustav Mahlers“. Ihre Forschungsschwerpunkte liegen auf der Orchestermusik der deutschsprachigen Länder des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts sowie auf der Interpretationspraxis von Dirigenten insbesondere im frühen 20. Jahrhundert.

Lóránt Péteri (Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music)

Paper: Nostalgia and Humour – Musico-Cinematic Intertextuality in István Szabó's *Father*

The lecture's main focus is *Father* [Apa], a 1966 Hungarian feature film directed by István Szabó, whose *Mephisto* (1981) was the first Hungarian movie receiving Academy Award (Oscar) for Best Foreign-Language Film. The music of *Father* is based on extended quotations from and allusions to the third movement of Mahler's First Symphony, and is composed by musicologist, pianist, composer, and jazz musician János Gonda. Spanning the historical period from World War II and the Holocaust till the aftermath of the supressed Hungarian revolution of 1956, the film's screenplay embraces such topics as childhood, loss, trauma, nostalgia, the interconnectivity of remembrance and subjectivity, and the fragile construction of identity. *Father* raises questions of a specific Jewish experience both explicitly and implicitly. Together with other layers of signification and ways of expression present in the music, the film also exploits the satirical and ironical aspects of Mahler's symphonic movement. The last scene captures, in the manner of cinéma-vérité, the often relaxed individual behaviour of and the lively social interactions between people gathering dynamically at a major cemetery of Budapest on All Soul's Day. It seems, therefore, that Szabó's dialogue with Mahler's music culminates in his own cinematic Todtenmarsch in 'Callots Manier'. István Szabó's experiment with the First Symphony can be regarded as a pioneering act of appropriating Mahler's music in the cinema – a phenomenon which became soon robust and global.

Lóránt Péteri is University Professor, Head of the Musicology Department, and Head of the Central European Music Research Group at the Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music

(State University), Budapest. He received his PhD degree from the University of Bristol, UK, in 2008, and his habilitation from the Liszt Academy, in 2015. He is a member of the Advisory Board of the Gustav Mahler Research Centre, Toblach (Italy). His research areas embraces the music of Gustav Mahler and the music culture of 20th-century Hungary, with special regard to the connections between music and politics. He was one of the co-organizers of the international conferences 'The Compositional Reception of Gustav Mahler' (Toblach, 2022), and 'Rethinking Central European Music' (Budapest, 2023). He is the author of two books, numerous book chapters and journal articles, and also co-editor of three edited volumes and a special issue.

The organisers

Anna Stoll Knecht is Assistant Professor at the University of Fribourg under a Starting Grant from the Swiss National Science Foundation, leading the team project 'The Musical World of Fairgrounds in Switzerland, 19th-21st centuries' (2024-2029). Previously a British Academy postdoctoral fellow at Oxford (Jesus College), she has engaged in research on Gustav Mahler's interpretation of Richard Wagner, both as a conductor and as a composer; and more recently on the use of sound and music in physical comedy (SNF Ambizione 2019-23). Recent publications include *Mahler's Seventh Symphony* (OUP, 2019); essays and articles in *Mahler in Context* (CUP, 2020), *Wagner in Context* (CUP, 2024) *Wagner Studies* (CUP, 2025), *Geography Notebooks* (no 4, 2021), and a chapter on Jacques Tati for the *The Palgrave Handbook of Film Music and Comedy* (2023).

Alice Verti is a final-year PhD candidate in musicology at the University of Innsbruck and Co-Founder of the PhD & ECR Forum of the Gustav Mahler Research Centre Innsbruck-Toblach. In Italy she graduated in Piano at the Modena Conservatory, got her Bachelor Degree in Philosophy at the University La Sapienza in Rome and her Masters Degree in Musicology at the University of Bologna. Her dissertation focuses on Gustav Mahler's Seventh Symphony and its exegesis as an ironical and self-reflective text. Between 2019 and 2021 she has been a DOC-Fellow of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Since 2018 she is a member of the Doctoral College 'Austrian Studies' at the University of Innsbruck and since 2024 is a collaborator to the 'Mahler Online' project.