

The Mahler Family Letters

*Stephen McClatchie,
Editor*

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THE MAHLER
FAMILY LETTERS

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LETTERS

*Edited, translated,
and annotated by
Stephen McClatchie*

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To
Henry-Louis de La Grange
and
Alfred and Maria Rosé, in memoriam

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PREFACE

In 1983, Mrs. Maria Rosé donated the core of the Mahler-Rosé Collection to the Music Library at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario, Canada. In addition to musical manuscripts, memorabilia, and letters to her father-in-law, violinist Arnold Rosé (who was married to Mahler's sister Justine), from leading composers and musicians, the donation included more than 500 unpublished letters from Gustav Mahler to his parents and siblings.¹ The majority of these letters were written before the fall of 1894 and document such things as Mahler's burgeoning career as a conductor and composer, his parents' illnesses and death, and the numerous trials and tribulations of his siblings Alois, Justine, Otto, and Emma. In the fall of 1894, the character of the letters changes when Justine and Emma begin living with Mahler in Hamburg and, later, Vienna, thus obviating the need to communicate by letter about quotidian matters. Instead, the later letters are written when Mahler is away from home, conducting his works or otherwise engaged. At this point, then, the coverage becomes markedly less thorough.

Many passages from these letters will not be totally unfamiliar to Mahler scholars. In the 1950s, Henry-Louis de La Grange travelled several times to London, Ontario, to stay with Alfred and Maria Rosé and read the letters. He then paraphrased or used translated excerpts as the basis for his account of Mahler's earliest years and his family relationships. Mahler scholars can only be grateful to the Rosés for their generosity in sharing these documents with him at the time. Nevertheless, when I began to work with the letters, it soon became clear that Rosé had allowed La Grange to see only about half of the letters. It is difficult to determine on what basis—if any—his choices were made, as many of the letters used by La Grange are critical of Justine (who was, of course, Alfred's mother), and many of the letters that Rosé did not show to him are completely innocuous.

In addition to all of the letters in the Mahler-Rosé Collection, this edition includes a number of other family letters. Several letters from Mahler to his parents and sister Justine were sold by Alfred Rosé during his lifetime. In most instances, he kept a photocopy of the letter; in one or two cases, however, I have had to rely on transcriptions made by La Grange. The letters to Emma Mahler were sold by her son Ernst Rosé at auction by Sotheby's in 1984 and are now

1. For an overview of the entire collection, see Stephen McClatchie, "The Gustav Mahler-Alfred Rosé Collection at the University of Western Ontario," *Notes* 52 (December 1995): 385–406.

dispersed. Fortunately, La Grange's transcriptions of these letters are also in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler. Copies of fourteen letters to Mahler from his parents and several of his siblings are found in the typescript of Alma Mahler's memoirs at the University of Pennsylvania. All but one of these letters were first published in translation in *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, and are included here in my own translation with the permission of the University of Pennsylvania;² the German edition of this volume is their first publication in the original language. Finally, the Mahler-Rosé Collection contains several unpublished letters from Mahler to close family friends; I have included these in my notes to the family letters. (Admittedly, a number of the family letters are of staggering unimportance—letter 545 particularly comes to mind. As these are, without exception, short and few in number, they have been included in the interest of completeness.)

Mahler seldom dated his letters to his family. Once or twice he went through phases when he dated letters, once even admonishing his sister to always date *her* letters; unfortunately, some of his dates are demonstrably incorrect—even as much as a year off. As few envelopes have survived, a significant challenge has been to establish dates for the letters. Many may be dated on the basis of a performance mentioned in the letters.³ Occasionally Justine wrote a date across the top of a letter. In such cases, I have indicated this in the annotations and noted whether or not I have followed her suggestion (the reliability of these dates varies greatly). Many letters have dates in pencil by Alfred Rosé. For the most part, I have ignored these, as they are often incorrect. Although many of the letters are mentioned in Henry-Louis de La Grange's monumental biography of Mahler, as already mentioned Alfred Rosé did not show him all of the letters in the 1950s. Consequently, he made some understandable errors in dating the letters that he did use (these errors are generally not noted in my annotations).

When the letters were donated to the University of Western Ontario, they were in twenty-one manila envelopes, likely as they had been stored in the vault of the Bank of Montreal downtown. While the arrangement of the letters was not chronological, there were nevertheless pockets of chronology; at times, this helped me to determine, for example, that a letter belongs to the Budapest years as opposed to the Hamburg years. (The first element of the shelfmark for each letter refers to the envelope, thus E3-MJ-113 is a letter to Justine from the third envelope; the last number is the unique accession number for each item.) I have also examined the paper (type and watermark) used in each letter. In a few

2. *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, the original edition selected by Alma Mahler, enlarged and edited with new introduction, illustrations, and notes by Knud Martner and translated by Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser, and Bill Hopkins (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), pp. 375–84.

3. Information about Mahler's conducting activities is found in Zoltan Roman, *Gustav Mahler and Hungary* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1991); and Bernd Schabbing, *Gustav Mahler als Konzert- und Operndirigent in Hamburg* (Berlin: Ernst Kuhn, 2002); the database of Hofoper rehearsals and performances is found on the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft Web site, www.gustav-mahler.org; and also see Knud Martner, *Gustav Mahler im Konzertsaal: Eine Dokumentation seiner Konzerttätigkeit 1870–1911* (Copenhagen: Knud Martner, 1985).

instances, based on the use of a type of paper found only between two years, I have been able to assign a likely date.

In assigning dates to the letters, I have relied on the type of evidence described above, as well as the internal evidence of the letters themselves. I have also read many hundreds of unpublished letters from Mahler in search of references connected to the family letters, often with great success. As a result, there are only a few letters that cannot be dated with reasonable certainty; these undated letters are found at the end of each chapter.

Where possible, the letters have been transcribed from the originals. For those letters not in the Mahler-Rosé Collection, I have made every effort to locate photocopies of the originals. In some instances, as noted above, I have relied on transcriptions made by Henry-Louis de La Grange. The early family letters survive only in Alma Mahler's typescript. These letters have been newly translated in an effort to maintain stylistic conformity (although I did consult the published translation); likewise for the four letters to Justine published in *Gustav Mahler Unbekannte Briefe*.⁴ In my translation, I have generally used the titles for works which are most familiar to English-speaking readers, thus *Don Giovanni* instead of *Don Juan*. Mahler frequently uses the Italian expression *Vederemo* (We will see), which I have left untranslated. In this volume, Mahler's emphases have been rendered in italics; words and phrases that he underlines twice are italicized and underlined.

Most of Mahler's frequent enclosures (reviews, letters, etc.) are lost, although some letters that were sent to Justine for her autograph collection do survive in the Mahler-Rosé Collection. In most instances, they are included in the annotations. For individuals mentioned more than once or twice, I have provided brief biographical notes, which may be found in the appendix. To assist the reader, I have prefaced each section with a chronology outlining significant events in the lives of Mahler and his family members; for the most part, these chronologies reflect the events surrounding the letters in this volume (and thus are much less detailed after 1902, when there are many fewer family letters). They are not to be read as an exhaustive chronology of that period of Mahler's life.

One final aspect of the letters is worth mentioning here. While Mahler usually addressed his letters either to his parents or to Justine, he fully expected that they would be read by other family members as well as friends. Thus, one occasionally finds a comment directed specifically to Justine in a letter to his parents, or an aside to Natalie Bauer-Lechner in a letter to Justine.

The letters in the Mahler-Rosé Collection are published with the kind permission of Marina Mahler and the University of Western Ontario Library System. The letters will appear in the original German (and a translation of the rest of this volume) next year with the Weidle Verlag, Bonn. I am grateful to Stefan Weidle and Helmut Brenner for their helpful comments and suggestions, some of which are reflected in this volume. The Social Sciences and Humanities

4. Ed. Herta Blaukopf (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1983).

Research Council of Canada provided support for this project in the form of a Postdoctoral Fellowship (1994–1996) and a Standard Research Grant (1997–2000). For transcription and translation assistance, I am grateful to Astrid Heyer, Bruce Plouffe, and Barbara Reul and to Herta Blaukopf, Rita Steindl, and the late Emmy Hauswirth of the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft. Zoltan Roman kindly shared his expertise on matters Hungarian, and Jerry Bruck generously offered copies of two letters to Emma Mahler from his collection. I also wish to thank Mary Beth Payne, formerly of Oxford University Press, and her successor, Kim Robinson, for their support and encouragement.

This project has taken far longer to complete than I could ever have imagined. Five individuals have played particular roles in seeing it through. I wish to thank Henry-Louis de La Grange for his hospitality in Paris during my visit to the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler and for so generously sharing material with me. His support has been crucial to this edition, and I am honoured that he has allowed me to dedicate it to him, in part. In Vienna, my friends Morten and Doris Solvik not only put me up on my first visit to the city, they also were very helpful in many other ways—deciphering Austrianisms not being the least of these. Stephen Hefling read the entire manuscript and provided many helpful comments and suggestions; he also generously shared his transcriptions of Mahler's letters to Anna von Mildenburg. Finally, my friend and colleague Lisa Philpott, reference librarian in the Music Library at the University of Western Ontario, answered innumerable questions and made what probably seemed like endless numbers of trips into the Mahler-Rosé Room to check minor details in the collection. Her kindness and unfailing good humour means a lot to me.

And, as always, Peter was there every step of the way.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- BGA *Ein Glück ohne Ruh': Die Briefe Gustav Mahlers an Alma*. Edited and annotated by Henry-Louis de La Grange and Günther Weiß. Berlin: Siedler Verlag, 1995.
- BWB Bruno Walter. *Briefe 1894–1962*. Edited by Lotte Walter Lindt. Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer, 1969.
- GMB² *Gustav Mahler Briefe*. 2d ed. Edited by Herta Blaukopf. Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1996. (This is an additional revision of the 1983 expansion and revision of the first edition of GMB, originally published in 1924 by Alma Mahler-Werfel.)
- HLG Henry-Louis de La Grange. *Gustav Mahler: Chronique d'une Vie*. 3 vols. Paris: Fayard, 1979–1984.
- HLGE Henry-Louis de La Grange. *Gustav Mahler*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995–. (This is a revised English translation of HLG. To date, volumes 2 and 3 of a projected four volumes have been issued: *Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897–1904)* and *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904–1907)*. I have not used the original English version of volume 1, published by Doubleday in 1979.)
- MSB *Gustav Mahler–Richard Strauss Briefwechsel 1888–1911*. Edited by Herta Blaukopf. Munich: Piper, 1980.
- NBL *Gustav Mahler in den Erinnerungen von Natalie Bauer-Lechner*. Revised and expanded version, edited by Herbert Killian, with notes by Knud Martner. Hamburg: Karl Dieter Wagner, 1984.
- Selected Letters* *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*. The original edition selected by Alma Mahler, enlarged and edited with new Introduction, Illustrations, and Notes by Knud Martner. Translated by Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser, and Bill Hopkins. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979.

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INTRODUCTION

Gustav Mahler and His Family

Gustav Mahler's letters to his family are almost entirely unknown, yet they form the largest and probably most important single source of information about all aspects of his life before the mid-1890s: his personality; his relationships with his family and several close friends; his first positions in Kassel, Prague, Leipzig, Budapest, and Hamburg; and several of his earliest compositions. They also document significant later events such as his campaign to be named director of the Vienna Hofoper,¹ his conducting tours throughout Europe, and his courtship of Alma Schindler. Many of these things will emerge from the letters themselves (or from the annotations), but several elements are worth exploring at the outset, as they do not emerge as clearly from the individual letters, or because the letters themselves do not tell the entire story. First, it will be useful to introduce Mahler's family and provide a brief sketch of each of Mahler's siblings. Second, in addition to the family members, there are several other individuals worthy of commentary with regard to the roles that they played in Mahler's life: his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner; his lover Anna von Mildenburg; and his wife, Alma. Our understanding of Mahler's relationships with the first and last, in particular, is significantly changed by these letters.

It is largely to Mahler's sister Justine that we owe the survival of more than 500 letters to her, his parents, and several of their siblings. Beginning in the mid-1880s, when she was sixteen or seventeen, Justine carefully preserved his letters to her, as well as other letters that came into her possession. None of Mahler's earlier letters to his family have survived.

By this time, only six of Bernhard and Marie Mahler's fourteen children were still living: Leopoldine, Gustav, Alois, Justine, Otto, and Emma. Both Bernhard and Marie were often unwell, and many of the first letters concern visits to doctors and suggested treatments. Bernhard seems to have suffered from a heart ailment, from which he eventually died on 18 February 1889. Marie, while doubtless also worn out by the rigours of childbearing, had asthma. She died on 11 October 1889, predeceased by her eldest surviving daughter, Leopoldine (b. 1863), on 27 September. Gustav's earliest surviving letter to his parents concerns his surprise about Leopoldine's engagement to businessman Ludwig

1. For a discussion of this, see Stephen McClatchie, "Gustav Mahler's Vienna Campaign: Unpublished Letters from the Gustav Mahler-Alfred Rosé Collection," *Studies in Music from the University of Western Ontario*, forthcoming.

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Quittner (letter 5), with whom she subsequently had two children. In August 1889, Leopoldine fell ill with severe headaches, which Gustav mistakenly suggested were related to her nerves (letter 82) but which probably were manifesting a brain tumour.

After his mother's death, Gustav sent Emma to Vienna to join Otto (a student at the Conservatory) with their friends Friedrich and Uda Löhr, and had Justine come to him in Budapest. Toward the end of 1889, he described the family situation in a letter to his former director in Leipzig, Max Staegemann:

A younger sister and brother I am having educated in Vienna, and another [brother] (somewhat older) is now in the military. My [other] sister is very ailing. She literally destroyed her nerves through the terrible physical exertions at my parents' sickbeds and all the violent emotions associated with it.²

After her brother, Justine (1868–1938) is the dominant presence in this volume. In an unpublished passage from her memoirs, family friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner describes Justine's character in terms amply confirmed by the family letters:

Justi, who looked after the Mahler siblings and household, at once won all of my interest and sympathy. She was not equal to the office that fell upon her so early—she herself first needed the guidance and education that she and the others (there were 13 [*sic*] children in all) had *never* had the benefit of, owing to the poorest and most neglected economic circumstances out of which they came. Her very weakened health (which Justi had acquired from three years of devoted care for her seriously ill parents)—her youth, and her (Gustav-like) impetuous, passionate, and far-from systematic [*pädagogisches*] nature did not make her well suited as a mentor for Otto and Emma.³

She did indeed have to assume many responsibilities at an early age: first, caring for her ill parents, and then assuming primary responsibility for her younger siblings, Otto and Emma. Undoubtedly, she had lots to learn about managing money and running a household and not infrequently chafed in her quasi-maternal role, but Alma Mahler's portrayal of her in *Erinnerungen und Briefe* as duplicitous and scatter-brained is both unfair and exaggerated.⁴ Much later, however, Justine herself recognised how much she had been educated by Gustav (see letter 510). The passage from Natalie's memoirs quoted above concludes with a description of Mahler's siblings' education—or lack thereof:

A fanatical Catholic governess for Emma, who came to her from God knows where, and the supervision and instruction provided for by the

2. Erich H. Mueller von Asow, "Ein ungedruckter Brief Mahlers," *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 12 (1957): 63–64.

3. "Mahleriana," Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler.

4. Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 4th ed., trans. Basil Creighton, ed. Donald Mitchell and Knud Martner (London: Cardinal, 1990), pp. 9–14, 36, 55–56, 143–44.

good Löhrs (who lived in the same house and to whom G. had attached the siblings) did not improve the confusion: since, on the one hand, without absolute authority nothing could be done at all, and on the other, Löhr's idealism, and the impracticality . . . of this good and admirable man, was yet another misfortune for our wild Mahler pack—for whom only the most practical, realistic, and often even the most brutal treatment would have been suitable. Everything possible in terms of unusual and expensive instruction was undertaken, but showed no results. Otto neither completed secondary school [*Gymnasium*] nor did he finish the Conservatory, as outstandingly musically talented as he was. Indeed, he couldn't manage the preparation for the one-year voluntary recruit examination (which any idiot can do) [even] with the most expensive teachers, which G. engaged for him! The same went for the girls, as a supplement of their defective Iglau education: a lot was begun, without ever leading to anything.

Although Mahler initially intended to move his family to Budapest with him in late 1889, in the end, Justine, Otto, and Emma rented an apartment in Vienna on the Breitegasse—a fact for which posterity can only be grateful, as it necessitated regular communication by letter on Mahler's part. Throughout the Budapest and early Hamburg years, Mahler wrote Justine hundreds of times during the operatic season; during the summers, however, they were generally together, unless Mahler was off on a bicycling or walking tour, or other solitary trip. In the autumn of 1894, however, Justine and Emma moved to Hamburg and the character of the letters changed. Justine continued to keep house for her brother in Hamburg and then Vienna until they both married in March 1902.

Justine's conversion to Christianity illustrates her closeness to her brother. In early December 1896, she wrote to her friend Ernestine Löhr:⁵

We are all still taking instruction, and yesterday the priest said that we'll probably be finished by the middle of February. Emma and I are doing it only to make the matter easier for Gustav; it relates to the position at the Vienna Opera (secret). . . . The first priest asked why we were doing it; I didn't have the heart to tell him that it was out of conviction, and he didn't seem to have any great desire [to do it], so I went to another one—coincidentally an Austrian, very liberal, and such a nice fellow that we have invited him to dine next week. The whole business seems as if I were acting in the theatre, since I do not believe a word and could

5. Ernestine Löhr (1863–1942?) was the sister of Mahler's close friend Friedrich; in fact, the Mahlers were close to the entire family (see appendix). The Mahler-Rosé Collection contains typewritten copies of seventy-six letters from Justine to Ernestine written between April 1893 and July 1900 (a copy of one additional letter is in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler). It is unclear when these copies were made, although since they have what appears to be Justine's handwriting on them, it must have been before her death in August 1938. As these letters come largely from the period after September 1895 when the family correspondence is less informative about personal matters, they provide invaluable context for, and illumination of, the family letters.

immediately refute everything he is saying; I am learning the subject like a poem in a foreign language.⁶

On 23 February 1897, Mahler's conversion took place in the Hamburg Kleine Michaeliskirche. It seems likely that Justine and Emma were baptised on the same day, since Justine commented to Ernestine that "we don't want to let G[ustav] jump into it on his own."⁷ Despite Justine's apparent lack of conviction in her conversion, the Mahler family letters make it clear that certain aspects of Christianity had long been part of their lives: the Mahler family had celebrated Christmas, at least insofar as exchanging gifts and decorating a Christmas tree, since the 1880s.

Mahler's eldest surviving sibling was his brother Alois (1867–1931). No photograph of him survives, and very little is known about much of his life. While his parents were living, it appears that he assisted his father with the business and may have inherited it, or a portion of it, after their deaths (all of the Mahler siblings had an inheritance). In the fall of 1889, Alois was drafted into the army, and he served in a regiment based in Brünn.⁸ He seems to have served less than his full three years, however, as he was looking for work in early 1892. Natalie Bauer-Lechner describes Alois as the "worst" of the siblings: "Moreover, in addition, the worst of them came from a distance—Alois, who had served his 3 years in Brünn as a private in the military and continually assaulted her [Justi] and G. with troubles and demands of the most unprecedented sort."⁹ Her judgement is amply illustrated by the family letters, which frequently attest to Alois's unreliability and even dishonesty.

Mahler made efforts to find Alois a position in the business world, but ultimately decided to let him go his own way (see letter 326). At first, having changed his name to Hans Christian, he lived in Vienna and worked as a chief accountant (*Oberbuchhalter*); at times, he lived together with Otto. In December 1894, Justine wrote to Ernestine that she never heard from Alois other than when he needed money; in July 1895, she asked her not to tell him that she was coming to Vienna. After the mid-1890s, he is never mentioned in the letters to Justine.¹⁰ In 1910, Alois emigrated to the United States, and, as Susan Filler has discovered, died in Chicago on 14 April 1931.¹¹

Mahler's brother Otto (1873–1895) was a musician. At the age of fifteen he was admitted to the Conservatory of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde,

6. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 2–3 December 1896.

7. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 18 February 1897.

8. Letter 81 indicates that he expected to be drafted during the next six weeks.

9. "Mahleriana," Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler.

10. In a letter to Alma of 29 January 1904 (BGA 61), Mahler mentions that he encountered Alois at the Westbahnhof in Vienna—seemingly for the first time in a very long time—and was afraid that they would have to travel together or even share a sleeping car.

11. Susan M. Filler, "The Missing Mahler: Alois (Hans) in Chicago," in *Neue Mahleriana: Essays in Honour of Henry-Louis de La Grange on His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Günther Weiß (Berne: Peter Lang, 1997), pp. 39–45.

but left of his own volition in early 1892;¹² Justine and Natalie Bauer-Lechner kept the news from Gustav, who was furious. Since only a single letter of Otto's survives in the Mahler-Rosé Collection (letter 81), and not much more in other collections, Justine's comments in her letters to Ernestine about Otto's lazy character are all the more valuable and corroborate Mahler's own comments in his letters to Justine. These sources reveal Mahler's efforts in 1894 to find a suitable position for Otto. Posts in neither Bremen nor Leipzig were successful, and by the end of 1894 the situation was becoming desperate. By early 1895, Justine was hearing "unpleasant [*unerquickliches*]" news: "[Otto] is becoming alarmingly thin; in the course of this, I can't help thinking of Hans Rott, and there one can't do anything."¹³ On 6 February 1895, Otto Mahler shot himself in Nina Hoffmann's flat in Vienna. Gustav's reaction is not recorded in any of his letters. Fortunately, Justine communicated frequently with Ernestine during this period; she soon wrote that she had awaited the news daily; only the day before Gustav had asked her to "spare [him] all agitation now" because he was "too tired," and then the news came: "What has happened to Gustav, you will appreciate," she wrote to Ernestine, and commented that it was good that he was so busy.¹⁴ Later she wrote rather eloquently to Ernestine:

The *photograph* has been in my possession since yesterday. It is so life-like that one hears him speak—I cannot imagine that I will never again be able to hear him speak. The thought it can no longer be undone is so awful. Today I showed the photograph to Gustav, but now I am sorry because he became so terribly sad. . . . Spring has come with a vengeance, but it fills me with melancholy. The life that I have before me seems so unbearably long. . . . I never ever wished that there would be a meeting again after death, not even when my mother died; now I do. I always have the feeling that he was not serious about dying, and can say to you that if he had had the fortune to have had different people around him—people who would not have taken his desire to die seriously—it could not have happened, it also would not have happened. I certainly know how it really looked inside him the last time he was here in Hamburg; you already have his letters from then. I can still hear him telling me "if I don't shoot myself now, it would be like blackmail!" And I talked him out of it, so that he went to Vienna and lived there for 3 months; in Nina's first letter [she wrote that] "he has now given up certain thoughts." Alois's proximity, to a large degree, contributed to the catastrophe, but he is certainly limited [*beschränkt*]; one can't tell him anything. I long with my whole heart to

12. The annual yearbook of the Conservatory for 1891–1892 indicates that Otto left the school on 27 April 1892 (*Jahresbericht über das Conservatorium für Musik und darstellende Kunst . . . für das Schuljahr 1891–1892* [Vienna: Verlag des Conservatoriums der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, 1892]). For Otto's studies at the Conservatory, see Elisabeth Maier, "Ein Bruckner-Schüler namens Mahler," *Nachrichten zur Mahler-Forschung* 49 (Fall 2003): 16–23.

13. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 8?–9 and 16–17 January 1895.

14. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, early February 1895.

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be able to say: “the Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away, the name of the Lord be praised!”¹⁵

A trunk containing Otto’s effects, including his compositions and, perhaps, Mahler’s letters to him, was destroyed when a bomb hit Alma Mahler’s house towards the end of the Second World War; according to Alma, Mahler had been afraid to open it.

The youngest Mahler, Emma (1875–1933), is rather more of a cipher. She and Gustav were not close, and Justine, too, seems to have shared her brother’s difficulties with Emma, complaining often about her laziness and self-centeredness. After moving to Hamburg with Justine in the fall of 1894, Emma fell in love with Bruno Walter, who had joined the Stadttheater in the 1894–1895 season;¹⁶ in September 1895, Justine wrote to Ernestine:

He was engaged here last year as chorus director, and this year advanced to conductor. I was there this week when he conducted—I cannot tell you how I felt as I sat there. G. says that he will be a highly significant conductor. Emma is infatuated with him, and while he has a lot of “regard” and “respect” for me, he seems to care more for Emma.¹⁷

Justine makes similar comments in other letters to Ernestine throughout 1895 and 1896 (by which time Walter had left Hamburg). At this point, it is unclear what happened, but by 1898 all had changed. That year, Walter met his future wife, Elsa, in Riga, and Emma married cellist Eduard Rosé (1859–1943) on 25 August. Emma was clearly not over Walter, however, as Justine intimated to Ernestine on 16 July 1898:

I am staying here with Emma until the 4th, since in the meantime Schlesinger [Walter] is going to Vienna with G’s piano score and I do not want her to see him; she doesn’t know that he is coming, otherwise I probably couldn’t keep her here.¹⁸

15. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 21–22 February 1895.

16. An unpublished passage from Natalie Bauer-Lechner’s memoirs (*Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler*) about Walter’s impending departure from Hamburg in 1896 provides an additional layer of significance to the Mahler-Walter relationship:

“We are losing the only one,” Justi said to me, “with whom one can associate spiritually and humanly, and of whom one can be glad in one’s heart. Heaven sent him to us last year in deliverance as a replacement for Otto, whom he resembles a little bit both in his appearance and in his colossal natural musical ability. In him we have realised all the splendid and considerable hopes that we had vainly placed in Otto; I can still not see him today without painful joy.”

17. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 13 September 1895.

18. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 16 July 1898. There are two unpublished letters from Gustav to Walter from late July 1898 in the Bruno Walter Papers at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. In one, Gustav writes that Justine had already indicated to Walter why a visit that August was not advisable (fol. 347/iv). In the other, Mahler says that he will be back in Vienna on 1 August and arranges to meet Walter in his office; however “my sisters will follow already on Wednesday, and this means (as sorry as I am for it) that you ought not to be in Vienna any longer—for reasons of which you are aware” (fol. 350/iii.).

Immediately after their marriage, Emma and Eduard Rosé moved to the United States, where Eduard was engaged by the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Emma was unhappy there, however, so the Rosés returned to Europe in August 1900. Through Mahler's intercession, Eduard was engaged as *Konzertmeister* (concertmaster) and cello soloist in Weimar, where they spent the rest of their married life. Eduard ultimately fell victim to the Nazis, was deported, and died in Theresienstadt in 1943.¹⁹ Their two children, Ernst (1900–1987)—born in the United States—and Wolfgang (1902–1977), both emigrated to the United States.

There is no question that Mahler's siblings caused him many anxious moments. The unpublished passage from Natalie's memoirs cited above concludes with an apt summary of the situation as it appeared to a close family friend:

To manage these 3 [Alois, Otto, Emma], it would have required an all-powerful paternal authority—which might itself not have sufficed in the face of the almost pathological stubbornness and disobedience—indeed, even stupidity [*Ausgebundenheit*]²⁰—of these little Mahlers. It was like they were possessed by an evil spirit. These were not manageable circumstances from the outset, which continually brought on only the worst consequences—in spite of all of Gustav's endless care and far-too noble and lenient goodness, and Just's trouble and best intentions.²⁰

Mahler's close friend and confidante Natalie Bauer-Lechner (1858–1921) is a rather significant presence in the letters in this volume. She was quite intimate with Mahler and his family, almost from the very beginning of their renewed acquaintance in 1890 (Mahler had first met Natalie while attending the Conservatory, of which she was an alumna). Beginning with the summer of 1892, Natalie spent every summer with Mahler and his family and faithfully recorded her impressions and conversations with Mahler, which were subsequently published after her death.²¹ She often accompanied Justine on house-hunting trips (by bicycle) and generally arrived for holidays earlier and left later than Mahler so that she could help Justine with household chores. Natalie also frequently travelled with Justine apart from Mahler: she spent time with her in Merano during the winter of 1892–1893 and in Italy the following winter. In addition, in his letters to Justine, Mahler frequently sends his greetings to Natalie, occasionally asking Justine to let her read the entire letter.

Natalie, however, clearly desired more than friendship from Mahler, and many passages in the family letters indicate that he was not interested, and

19. For more on Eduard, see Bernhard Post, "Eduard Rosé: Ein Musikerschicksal im Spannungsfeld zwischen europäischer Kultur und deutscher Provinz," *Mainzer Zeitschrift* 96–97 (2001–2002): 417–35.

20. "Mahleriana," *Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler*.

21. Natalie's *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler* first appeared in 1923; NBL is an enlarged edition published by her great-nephew in 1984, but portions still remain unpublished.

Although Natalie's memoirs contain nothing about the summer of 1894, Justine's letters to Ernestine make it clear that she did spend some time at Steinbach, although perhaps not while Mahler was there (see note 2 to letter 380).

told her so. She was extremely jealous of Mahler's relationship with Anna von Mildenburg, although he discussed it with her openly (see below). The letters also reveal that, on numerous occasions, he was irritated by her constant meddling as well as her browbeating of him. As an example of the latter, consider the following letter to Mahler:

What do you do then *after* the opera? Please don't sit too long in the restaurant afterwards. It would be better to have your ham sandwich and then a little something else in the *theatre*, as in Hamburg. Going to bed late and eating late at night ruins your nerves and your health—especially drinking lots of coffee! Sleep your fill in the *morning* as well and do not neglect your siesta every afternoon: you do have to save up for the summer and your hut [*Häuschen*]*—that is the one and only thing that matters, right?*²²

Given Natalie's romantic hopes, she naturally also had the obvious motivation of keeping Mahler at home and away from other women.

Despite their occasional crises, Mahler did value her friendship and worried when he thought that he might have hurt her (see, for example, letters 349 and 381). It must be admitted, however, that there was something rather perverse in Mahler's treatment of Natalie: he clearly knew what she wanted and in some senses he indulged her hopes, yet he was not prepared to marry her. And this treatment went on for about a decade.

One extended story is worth telling, as it is difficult to piece together from the letters themselves: the crisis of the second half of 1901, which led to the dissolution of Natalie's friendship with Mahler. In Alma Mahler's account, it is tied up with Gustav's discovery of the liaison between Justine and Arnold Rosé.²³ There are two intertwined issues, as reported (and mediated) by Alma.²⁴ The first involves Mahler's alleged anger at Justine's "treachery": her romantic attachment to violinist Arnold Rosé (1863–1946). According to Alma, Natalie and Justine had made a pact to facilitate each other's liaisons, but Natalie ultimately betrayed the news to Gustav. The second issue revolves around Natalie's renewed attempt to persuade Mahler to marry her. Alma alluded to this somewhat opaquely in her *Erinnerungen und Briefe*, but was more candid in the unpublished version of these memoirs:

It was autumn 1901. Mahler had gone back to Vienna after the holidays. Justine was supposed to put the Maiernigg house in order with the help of their "friend" [Natalie] and follow after him. Frau Bauer Lechner, however, couldn't bear the distance and <ordered> had a telegram

22. Unpublished letter of 5 August 1897 (Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler).

23. Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, pp. 12–14.

24. Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, pp. 12–14. See also HLGE II, pp. 578–79. Alma's assertions about her sister-in-law in her published books are not particularly reliable, as they had come to dislike each other when these were written. (Traces of this later tension are visible in several of the later letters in this volume; see letters 529, 561, and 566.)

sent <from Vienna> that her mother was dying in order to have a well-founded reason to give Justine for going to Vienna.—Meanwhile Frau Bauer had left no stone unturned in Vienna trying to prevail upon Mahler. She fell around his neck and tried to embrace him, but he repulsed her. She became even more insistent and finally there was an exchange that [later] was a *catch phrase* in the Mahler house.

Bauer: Marry me, for God's sake.

Mahler: No.

Bauer: Why not?

Mahler: I can't love you, I can only love a beautiful woman.

Bauer: But I *am* beautiful. I am beautiful. Just ask [Henriette] Mankiewicz. (She was a kitschy painter.)

Frau Bauer Lechner suffered greatly from this rebuff, but soon comforted herself with a painter, Schl . . . , and strongly flaunted this liaison. Mahler, who was completely indifferent towards her as a woman, was annoyed about this and said to me: well—she could at least have waited until the year of mourning was over.²⁵

New information from the family letters serves to refocus the situation somewhat. Natalie's *Erinnerungen* reports that the summer of 1901 was a time of particular closeness between her and Gustav; as a token of their "time of closest mutual harmony [*besten Übereinstimmung*]" that summer, Mahler gave her the preliminary materials of his most recent *Lieder*.²⁶ Likewise, Mahler's letters from the summer of 1901 often mention Arnold Rosé in a friendly fashion, as they had for several years. If the news of Rosé's relationship with Justine did indeed emerge during this period, it does not seem to have floored Mahler, for there is no trace of any conflict in the family letters. The surviving documents do not make it possible to ascertain when Mahler was first aware of his sister's liaison—letters 508–510 from December 1901 make it clear that by then, at least, it was out in the open—but they do not record any estrangement whatsoever; rather to the contrary. At one point he even told Justine that people were gossiping about the two of them, just as they did about him and Natalie (letter 494).

The letters from early September 1901 suggest two possible interpretations, between which it is difficult to choose. Either Justine and Arnold were underhandedly concealing their relationship from Mahler by attempting to discredit Natalie's hints about it—in this scenario, Justine diverted Mahler by accusing Natalie that she was trying to drive a wedge between them by making up stories. Or, Justine and Arnold had had enough of Natalie's machinations—the supposed "pact" allowing her frequent access to Mahler—and were trying to warn him about it.

25. "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); a copy of this passage can be found in the Musiksammlung, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, F 102 Vondenhoff 1/1413.

26. NBL, p. 195.

Regardless of the situation with Justine and Rosé, it is clear that Natalie renewed her pursuit of Mahler in the late summer of 1901. The urgent telegram calling her back to Vienna, which Alma Mahler uncharitably assumed was a fake, may in fact have been real (see letters 492 and 502). Still, at some point a confrontation between the two did take place, into which Justine was drawn (see letter 503). It is noteworthy that even at this difficult moment, Mahler was capable of seeing the good in Natalie; he was concerned that Justine would allow her grudge against Natalie to fester and reminded his sister that they all must continue to get along with each other. Again, Mahler did not wish to hurt Natalie. Despite his optimistic hope that the matter was settled, it was not: less than a week later, Mahler was obliged to tell Natalie the “unvarnished truth” (*ungeschminckte Wahrheit*): that he did not love her (letter 505). At this point, Natalie vanishes from the family letters, although the final break with Mahler did not occur until after his engagement to Alma Schindler that December.

The arrival of soprano Anna von Mildenburg (1872–1947) in Hamburg for the 1895–1896 season is not reflected in Mahler’s letters, since he, Justine, and Emma were all living together at the time. She is first mentioned in a letter of 7 October 1895 in which Justine tells Ernestine that “according to Gustav [Anna was] a talent, the like of which has not been seen for years.”²⁷ Justine’s letters to her friend show that Anna was a frequent visitor to the Mahler home that fall. In early November, after Gustav had walked Anna home one night, Justine and Gustav talked until the early hours; although she does not say so specifically, she implies that the talk was about his feelings for Anna. Moreover, unpublished letters from Mahler to Anna indicate that they had already taken the acquaintance to the next step, friendship, by late November, as they were now using the familiar *Du*.²⁸

Later letters to Ernestine make it clear that Justine was fully apprised of the nature of their relationship, and she traces its ups and downs—real or imagined on her part—in her letters to Ernestine. By September 1896, Justine herself had become quite good friends with Anna, only she did not want Natalie to know about it, since “she would immediately become unnecessarily jealous, and because of that her behaviour towards G[ustav] would become unnatural and there would be unpleasant scenes again.”²⁹ She also admitted to Ernestine that, because of Gustav’s relationship with Anna, “I have come to terms with the fact that I am no longer the nearest to G[ustav]’s heart.”³⁰ Her admiration for Anna’s talent was considerable, although typically it was reflected through Mahler himself, who—to Justine at least—had shaped her as an artist and a human being. Justine’s letters to Ernestine suggest that, contrary to Alma’s later

27. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 7 October 1895.

28. Mahler’s letters to Mildenburg are found in the Theatersammlung of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek; approximately 126 of them are unpublished. I am grateful to Stephen Hefling for sharing his transcriptions of these letters with me.

29. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 12 September 1896.

30. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 5 November 1896.

portrayal, Mahler's relationship with Mildenburg must have been common knowledge, at least in Hamburg; their mutual Hamburg friend Adele Marcus, apparently, was "dying of jealousy."³¹

In March 1902, Mahler married the young, beautiful, and talented Alma Schindler (1879–1964). Alma occupies a lesser place in the family letters (which are many fewer in number after 1901) than does Natalie or Anna. The letters do offer a new perspective on their courtship, however, as they include four letters from Justine to Gustav written during the crucial month of December 1901; Justine, always acutely conscious of her brother's place in history, must have kept copies of them (Mahler's replies make it clear that the letters were actually sent). When read in conjunction with Gustav's letters to Justine, as well as the unexpurgated edition of his correspondence with Alma and her contemporary diaries, we are able to form a more rounded perspective on the events of that December.³²

Much has been written about Alma and her relationship with Gustav.³³ Before Henry-Louis de La Grange's pioneering work, our view of the Mahler marriage was largely shaped by Alma herself, in works written many years after the fact. Her biography of Mahler and her autobiography are fascinating and frustrating monuments of self-aggrandisement and self-justification.³⁴ Both are riddled with errors, distortions, and self-serving depictions of events; the 1995 edition of Mahler's letters to Alma (BGA) shows just how much Alma suppressed in her partial publication of the correspondence in the biography. Alma was anxious to portray her marriage in a certain light for posterity, possibly to alleviate her guilt over her betrayal of Gustav with Walter Gropius in the summer of 1910—thus, her insistence on certain myths about Mahler's character, principally relating to his emotional and sexual life before meeting her. Alma's image of Mahler as neurotic, ascetic, sexually inexperienced, and in thrall to his family allowed her to depict herself as his saviour.

Such myths, however—as well as many other things in the books—are contradicted by sources in her own hand, such as her diaries and unpublished drafts

31. Justine Mahler to Ernestine Löhr, 5 November 1896. In the same letter she wrote that Anna "is a true Viennese girl, rather frivolous, but very unassuming this year and interested in us too."

32. BGA; and Alma Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten 1898–1902*, ed. Antony Beaumont and Susanne Rode-Breyman (Frankfurt-am-Main: Fischer, 1997).

33. In addition to HLG II and HLGE II, see the introduction to Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*; Karen Monson, *Alma Mahler: Muse to Genius* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983); and Françoise Giroud, *Alma Mahler; or, The Art of Being Loved*, trans. R. M. Stock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991). See also Stuart Feder, "Before Alma: Gustav Mahler and 'Das Ewig-Weibliche,'" in *Mahler Studies*, ed. Stephen E. Hefling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 78–109; and Stuart Feder, *Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2004).

34. Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters* (first appeared in 1940 as *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe*). The autobiography was first published in a shortened English version as *And the Bridge Is Love*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958) before appearing in the original German as *Mein Leben* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1960).

35. See Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*. Copies of her book drafts may be consulted at the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler. To take one example, Gustav's letters to Anna, as well as many comments in letters from Justine to Ernestine Löhr, make it clear that this affair was widely known and, in

of her books, as well as letters by others.³⁵ As part of her campaign of disinformation, Alma destroyed all of her own letters to Gustav, thus robbing us of half of the correspondence. Her contemporary diary entries, however, as well as Gustav's responses to her (lost) letters in his, function as something of a palimpsest of her own missing letters to him, in terms of character at least.³⁶ Given her need to shape events according to her version of the truth, it is surprising that she did not destroy these self-incriminating items; for that, at least, we can be grateful to her.

Stuart Feder has written extensively about the psychological impact of the haemorrhage Mahler suffered in February 1901.³⁷ In his estimation, this near-death experience marked a significant caesura in Mahler's creative and personal life. It was followed in rather short order by his resignation from the Vienna Philharmonic; his shift from the *Wunderhorn*-influenced world of his first symphonies to the Fifth Symphony and Rückert settings begun that summer; the crisis with his confidante and hopeless admirer Natalie Bauer-Lechner in September 1901; and, possibly, the surprise of Justine's liaison with Arnold Rosé. According to Feder, the newly acquired consciousness of his own mortality also prepared Mahler psychologically to marry, to seek both the stability and continuity of a wife and children. And this marriage, of course, provoked further breaks: with Natalie, with most of his former friends, and with the domestic life he had shared with his sister.

In most accounts of the marriage, at least those by Mahlerians, it is Alma's character that comes most into question. Her published diary stops in early 1902, although selected entries until 1906 are found in the autobiography. Taken as a whole, these entries do reveal considerable self-awareness on her part: she often acknowledged what she called her other, vain (or "bad") self and struggled valiantly to overcome it. Although many of the published entries are critical of Gustav and the marriage, they do seem to have been written largely to let off steam, especially after arguments. For Alma, the role of Frau *Direktorin* was not an easy one to play; she disliked her other role as wife and mother and resented the loss of the intellectual life she had enjoyed before marriage. She certainly did rebel against her husband's domination, and it is striking to note that all of her subsequent affairs and marriages were with younger men; she too was looking for someone to dominate. Her friend Max Burckhard warned her before she married Gustav that it was wrong to join two such personalities—joining fire with water.³⁸ In this he was certainly right, but psychologist Stuart

all likelihood, fully physical, despite Alma's assertions in her published works. In fact, Alma herself called Gustav a flirt in her diary in November 1901, mentioning that he had had affairs with many singers, including Mildenburg.

36. Although from a later period (1910–1911), Alma's letters to Gropius clearly expose her lies and deceptions about their affair in her published works; Gropius resisted her importunate demands to return her letters to him. These fascinating letters play a central role in Reginald R. Isaacs, *Walter Gropius: Der Mensch und sein Werk*, 2 vols. (Berlin: Mann, 1983–1984).

37. See above, note 33.

38. Mahler-Werfel, *Tagebuch-Suiten*, 747 (22 December 1901).

Feder has also written persuasively that Alma may have taken some masochistic pleasure in self-effacement, at least during her marriage with Gustav; the trait is not much in evidence after his death.

But, in assessing the marriage, to focus solely on Alma's character and her flaws is both unkind and unfair: Gustav was at least as self-centred as she was, if not more so, as well as brutally honest and direct. These facets of his personality are seen throughout his letters, particularly in those contained in this volume.³⁹ There is no question that he was not an easy man to live with: Alma's diary and biography also record his obliviousness to the people around him and her continual embarrassment at his absent-mindedness.⁴⁰

In Feder's estimation, the balance of power in the relationship shifted noticeably after the three crises of 1907: the death of their daughter Maria; the diagnosis of Gustav's heart ailment; and his decision to leave the Court Opera. The final crisis came in the summer of 1910: while undertaking a cure at Tobelbad, Alma met and fell in love with the young architect Walter Gropius. Alma's published account of the mis-addressed letter, sent by Gropius to Gustav instead of Alma, and the subsequent meeting of the three in Toblach appears to be broadly correct.⁴¹ Although Alma chose to stay with Gustav, he was now terrified of losing her. His letters to Alma of the period are almost embarrassingly abject and fervent, and he displayed his love of Alma publicly in the dedication of the Eighth Symphony and by facilitating the publication of some of her *Lieder*. It was in this state of mind that Gustav sought out Sigmund Freud in Leiden in August 1910.

The Mahler marriage, of course, ended badly. Alma's affair with Walter Gropius continued, and in fact was facilitated by Alma's own mother, Anna Moll, with whom Gustav was extremely close. How much he knew of these events will never be known, for, as far as we can tell, he did not confide in anyone about the problems in his marriage.

Many other aspects of Mahler's life, personality, and career emerge in his letters to his family. In terms of his personality, these letters reveal not only his love, care, and concern for his family, but also his irritability, sarcasm, and need for control.⁴² They show the excitement of the young Mahler at his growing fame

39. After the terrible dinner with Alma in January 1902, Siegfried Lipiner wrote to Gustav that "[a]t heart, you don't consider anyone a person; we're all just *objects* to you. For no reason at all, you throw people away—you usually pick them up again—but not always." He also referred to Gustav's "inimitable coldness and irony." See HLGE III, p. 596.

40. See, in particular, the diary excerpts in *Mein Leben*.

41. Alma Mahler, *Memories and Letters*, pp. 172–75.

42. Mahler was not above lying to his family: for example, in early 1894 he hid the terms of his contract renewal in Hamburg from Emma because he did not want to bring her to Hamburg with Justine. There are other times in the letters where he and Justine agree not to tell Alois, Otto, or Emma certain things. As with all letters, a certain caution needs to be exercised in assessing Mahler's letters to his family and close friends. Letters are speech acts in and of themselves, written to convey a particular image or view of the world.

as a conductor and, eventually, as a composer and document his interactions with other significant figures such as Brahms, Bruckner, Bülow, and Richard Strauss. Without a doubt, these letters are the most significant source for Mahler's early career and for understanding—at least to a point—something of his relationships with his family and particularly close friends.

THE EARLY YEARS

Vienna, Kassel, Prague, Leipzig

Chronology

- 1860 7 July: GM born in Kalischt (Kalište) to Bernhard and Marie (née Herrmann) Mahler.
23 October: Mahler family moves to Iglau (Jihlava).
- 1863 18 May: birth of Leopoldine Mahler.
- 1867 6 October: birth of Alois Mahler.
- 1868 15 December: birth of Justine Mahler.
- 1873 18 June: birth of Otto Mahler.
- 1875 10 September: GM enters the Conservatory of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna.
19 October: birth of Emma Mahler.
- 1876 Earliest surviving piece composed: first movement of a piano quartet.
- 1877 September: GM obtains his *Matura* (*Gymnasium* diploma leading to university education) and enrolls at the Universität Wien.
- 1878 18 March: GM completes the text of *Das klagende Lied*.
2 July: GM completes his studies at the Conservatory.
Summer: GM's four-hand piano arrangement of Bruckner's Third Symphony is published by Rättig (made with the assistance of Rudolf Krzyzanowski, although his name does not appear on the title page).
- 1880 19 and 27 February, 5 March: completes three of five songs dedicated to Josephine Poisl (the manuscript forms part of the Gustav Mahler–Alfred Rosé Collection).
June, July, and August: GM employed conducting operettas at the theatre in Bad Hall. This was his first conducting position.
November: *Das klagende Lied* complete.
- 1881 3 September: first conductor at the Landschaftliches Theatre in Laibach (Ljubljana).
15 December: *Das klagende Lied* fails to win the Beethoven Prize.
- 1882 2 April: Laibach Landestheater closes, leaving GM without employment.
- 1883 10 January–17 March: conductor at the Königliche Städtische Theatre in Olmütz (Olomuoc).
13 February: Richard Wagner dies in Venice.
July: GM's first visit to Bayreuth (*Parsifal*).

- 21 August: *Königlicher Musik- und Chordirektor* at Königliches Theatre in Kassel.
- 1884 4 May: Leopoldine Mahler marries Ludwig Quittner.
23 June: premiere of *tableaux vivants* after Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen* with incidental music by GM (lost, although the tune of a serenade was subsequently employed in the *Blumine* movement of the original version of the First Symphony).
December: *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*.
- 1885 16 March: GM engaged as conductor at the Leipzig Neues Stadt-Theater as of July 1886.
27 April: GM released from his contract in Kassel at his request.
End June: GM leaves Kassel for Prague and Iglau.
1 August: conductor at the Königliche Deutsche Landestheater in Prague (debut: Cherubini, *Die Wasserträger*, 17 August).
- 1886 15 July: the season, and GM's contract, ends in Prague.
1 August: GM takes up his duties in Leipzig (debut: *Lohengrin*, 3 August).
- 1887 Spring/Summer: begins work on completion of Carl Maria von Weber's *Die drei Pintos*.
September–October: completes the score of *Die drei Pintos*.
13 October: first meeting with Richard Strauss.
- 1888 20 January: premiere of *Die drei Pintos* in Leipzig, conducted by GM.
February–March: composition of First Symphony.
17 May: after conflicts with Staegemann, GM's resignation is accepted.
June–August: composes *Tödtenseier* and completes the score of the First Symphony.

Letters

☺ I To Uncle Joseph and Aunt Barbara Fleischberger¹

Vienna, 17th September [1876 or 1877]²

My dears,

This time I have to apologise doubly: first, for not writing for so long, and second, for it being my fault that Frank's letter, which was already finished before your letter, dear uncle, arrived, and which only awaited my note, did not go off earlier. It is almost a luxurious feeling if one can intend to do something but can put it off again until the next day. You should have heard our conversations, which went, daily:

“Have you written to Ledetsch yet?”

“No, nor you!”

“Tomorrow we really have to write.”

“Certainly! As soon as you've written, tell me.”

And so on, without end. Finally, I managed to pull myself together, and finally you have that which was long awaited!—Incidentally, in the last two weeks I really have not had any time, literally. I couldn't even write to Iglau once.

I have very little news that would interest you, apart from the fact that it seems that one of my compositions will be performed at a Conservatory concert (thus creating a lot of work for me). I have enough lessons, and: "we are also getting along well with Gustav Frank!" What more could I ask? If any of you are coming to Vienna this year, we would be most pleased to have you as guests.

It is probably also interesting that I am now more or less standing on my own two feet, i.e. that, apart from this month, my parents do not have to send me a single kreutzer more. What is J[osef] Stransky³ doing? Please say hello to him from me.

Greetings to everyone.

Your devoted nephew,
Gustav Mahler

SHELFMARK: E6-MF-320

NOTES

¹ This letter was written jointly with Mahler's cousin Gustav Frank (1859–1923); both address themselves to their uncle and aunt in Ledetsch. Frank's portion is not included.

² According to HLG I, pp. 57–58.

³ Josef Stransky (1872–1936), Czech conductor; in 1911, he was Mahler's successor at the New York Philharmonic.

2 *From Leopoldine Mahler to Gustav*

[Iglau, Christmas 1880]

Dear Gustav!

You can imagine how excitedly we received your Christmas presents. On behalf of everyone, I want to thank you for them. Dear mother would have gladly written you herself, but she has a headache. We are all already looking forward to your visit at the end of January. You can prolong it as long as you like, then? Have you already spoken to G[ustav] Frank? At his request, we recently sent him your address. Apropos, I must announce the most recent event in our family to you. Albert Mahler¹ has become engaged to Fr[au] Sofie Adler, sister of Gottlieb.² I recently told you that the rumour spread that Frau Adler's husband was insane. The situation is this, you see: he had a stroke at the coffeehouse and he began to suffer from a mental illness under which he continues to labour; according to the physicians, no recovery is possible for him. Fr[au] Stella³ probably doesn't like us anymore, because she hardly ever visits anymore, and it would be too pushy of me if I went to visit her without having been invited.

Best wishes, and "here's to the New Year."

Your sister Leopoldine

Write to us soon!

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, “Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler” (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); not in *Selected Letters*

NOTES

¹ First cousin, married in 1881.

² Physicist Gottlieb Adler (1860–1893) attended the Universität Wien at the same time as Mahler.

³ Unidentified; nickname for Sophie.

3 *From Marie Mahler to Gustav*

Postcard

[Iglau, 14 November 1882]

Dear Gustav!

We are *all* well. You must have already got my letter today. I only ask you not to laugh at my worries and *take my advice*. Dear Father is quite well. Just don't worry. There is nothing new with us. May everything turn out according to the wish

of your faithful mother
Marie

Iglau 14.11.1882

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, “Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler” (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S1

4 *From Marie Mahler to Gustav*

Iglau, 15.12.1882

Dear Gustav!

We received your dear letter, and I am now replying to let you know that it would be our opinion that you would do better if you came home by the excursion train instead of staying in Vienna, since this year the Christmas holidays last for four days and you will certainly not be able to give lessons, and will have to live off available cash, and that would certainly cost you more than the journey to Iglau. You need not bring any luggage, of course. If necessary, I will help you out with laundry, although if you have any torn socks or shirts, you can bring them with you in the coach in your travel bag and the journey will cost you next to nothing. Then you can stay at home for a few days, and we can discuss everything in detail. The children and both of us are looking forward to seeing you, so this will be best, since it is too tiring for me to travel during the winter.—Will you write us right away if you are coming? And when? so that I can heat your room. I will also be able to properly finish quarrelling with you about those things that I really cannot in letters. Why these endless changes of apartment? I don't believe that there can be a single person apart from you who changes his apartment every 2 weeks. Will you end up changing your apartment every time

you change your underclothes? And in the end won't you find yourself without any underclothes or clothes? For as I know you, you will forget something in each place—and will continue to move until you have nothing left. Am I not right? However, I will leave the rest to discuss in person. Enough for today. One more thing: if you come home, bring me another bottle of *French brandy*.

Fond farewell; best wishes from us all.

Your faithful mother
Marie

Otto and Emma were very pleased with your letters. Emma writes to you several times a day; in fact, when she is home from school, she devotes herself exclusively to you. We would appreciate it very much if you would also look up Uncle Hermann before you came home. Also, I have given G[ustav] Frank your previous address, so if you have moved again, he will naturally not be able to find you, and so you must look him up. We wrote to him at the Academy of Fine Arts.

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S2

NOTE

¹ According to *Selected Letters*, p. 377, Mahler's father's brother Hermann Mahler.

5 To Parents

[c. 1884]

Dear Mother and Father,

I am flabbergasted. Poldi [Leopoldine] is engaged!¹ To whom? When? How? Wouldn't you like to tell me these little details sometime or other? I would at least like to learn, after the fact, something about those things for which there was no time *previously*. I am too furious to write any more, and I await *prompt* news!

Ever yours,
Gustav

P.S. No answer came to my last letter!

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-76

NOTE

¹ According to Henry-Louis de La Grange (unpublished chronology), Leopoldine married Ludwig Quittner in Vienna on 4 May 1884.

6 To Justine

Kassel, 26 April 1885

Dearest Justi,

You probably will not expect special thanks for finally remembering that I exist.—I cannot even spare you the reproach that your messages and news turned out to be rather sparse. Why do you express yourself so sparingly? What

sort of emotional agitation were you writing about? Now sit down sometime and write to me how you live and what you think about.—

I have heard nothing more from Poldi for months; they also seem to be angry with me.

You will certainly know that I have asked for my release here as of 1 July,¹ and also that it seems that I will probably spend next winter in Vienna, since my engagement in Leipzig does not begin until June 1886. So I will likely again be in Iglau now and then. What are our siblings up to? I never hear anything from them, and you know how important this is to me, don't you?

I myself am greatly indebted to Herr Schneck for receiving you in such a friendly manner. Give him my most courteous greetings—also to his wife, whom I do not know. If he comes to Leipzig sometime, hopefully he will take advantage of my hospitality too.

Today I write you only a little bit, because I am very busy. Once you've written me a really detailed letter, I'll do the same for you.

Very best wishes
from your brother
Gustav

SHELFMARK: SI-MJ-728

NOTE

¹ On 20 April 1885, Mahler asked the *Intendant* of the Königl. Schauspiele, Adolph Freiherr von und zu Gilsa (1838–1910), for the third time to be released from his contract; his request was granted on 27 April 1885. See Hans Joachim Schaefer, *Gustav Mahler in Kassel* (Bärenreiter, 1982), p. 49.

7 To Justine

Cassel, 9 May 1885

Dear Justi,

I received both of your letters, and am pleased that you have at least started to get healthy again. What you write me about household circumstances is very distressing. I feel confident that you will behave like a sensible girl—as your letters already suggest—and above all will never forget the consideration you owe to your parents, on one hand, and to your siblings on the other.—Now you must take my place at home.—So, what do you have to tell me?! You always start so very mysteriously, but then never seem to have the courage to come out with it. Just be completely open with me, that is best.—If you have done something wrong, then it is my business to tell you so, and you can then put up with a little dressing-down. If I had had such an adviser by my side, as you have with me, I would have been spared a lot of frustration and grief. If perhaps at home I am unable to answer as I might like to, no doubt an opportunity will arise when I can at least *hint* at what I think.

What your friend wrote you about *Basel* is not true. It was possible, mind you, but I have now made another decision for next year.¹ You'll soon hear about it.

You certainly shouldn't worry yourselves about reviews at all.—It is just as if Emma were to give her judgement about a performance. Moreover, I have already quarrelled with the critics here, and whenever they can, they grumble about me—which, by the way, does not touch me at all, and lowers me in the eyes of the public even less.

If Frau Poldi has become so proud, then she herself must bear the consequences. I remember, though, that at the time she sent me a few brief words of congratulation about my engagement in Leipzig. Perhaps she is waiting for a letter thanking her for it.

Give my regards to your kind hosts, and the very best wishes from your brother

Gustav

Write me soon, and in detail.

SHELFMARK: S1-MJ-729

NOTE

¹ On 1 August 1885 Mahler began a one-year contract as second conductor (*zweite Kapellmeister*) at the Königliche Deutsche Landestheater in Prague; see Vladimír Lébl, "Gustav Mahler als Kapellmeister des Deutschen Landestheaters in Prag," *Hudební věda* 12 (1975): 351–71.

8 To Parents

[Prague, 7 July 1885]¹

Dear Mother and Father,

I arrive tomorrow, Wednesday, on the same train that Father usually takes—the one that leaves here at 10:30.

If the weather is nice, please meet me at the station with a landau—but *only* if it is nice out, otherwise I'll go on foot.

Best wishes
from
Gustav

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-70

NOTE

¹ Mahler arrived in Iglau on Wednesday, 8 July, after having spent a few days in Prague.

9 To Parents

[Prague, end August 1885]

Dear Mother and Father,

The enclosed card¹ will give you the best idea of the state of things—On Saturday I am probably conducting *Tannhäuser* (without rehearsal) because Seidl has to leave early that morning.—I am rehearsing *Don Giovanni* (the aristocrat of operas) and *Trompeter von Säckingen* (a premiere).²—

You would hardly believe what a tremendous amount of work I have to get through. I have to newly stage [*einrichten*] both works.—I *really* hardly have time to eat or sleep.

Write me soon, won't you, because I am very concerned that I have had no news for so long. What are Poldi and Justi doing? Why don't they write me?—

Best wishes from
Gustav

Write at once!

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-51

NOTES

¹ Not extant.

² *Tannhäuser* was performed on Saturday, 22 August; the repertory list in Lébl, "Gustav Mahler als Kapellmeister des Deutschen Landestheaters in Prag," does not list the conductor. Seidl's last appearance was actually *Die fliegende Holländer* on Wednesday, 26 August. Mahler conducted the premiere of *Don Giovanni* on 6 September (see next letter) and *Der Trompeter von Säckingen* on 12 September.

❧ IO *To Parents*

Prague, 6 September 1885

Dear Mother and Father,

Only today have I had the time and leisure to write you a few lines. Dear Toni¹ will now have told you how things are going for me here; in addition, I can set down that it exceeds all my previous expectations. The orchestra, choir, soloists, and director treat me with greatest respect, and if nothing goes amiss, I can say that, with this step this year, I have come *much* farther. This advance means more than all the others put together. Tonight I conduct *Don Giovanni*, and it is a sign of Neumann's particular confidence that he hands over to me just this opera, because it is of great significance for Prague since Mozart composed it specifically for Prague, and he himself rehearsed and conducted it here. The citizens of Prague especially make the greatest demands. The newspapers—mainly the *Tagblatt*—will probably tear me to pieces, for I predict now that they will all cry "Oh! Oh! 'Tradition' has gone to the devil!" With this word, one means in fact the long-standing habit—or rather, rut—of performing a work on a stage. I have been concerned with none of this, and tonight I will calmly follow *my own* path.

By the way, now is the time when we could enjoy being together if you wanted to come and visit here. I await you as soon as possible! Mother dear, you must come and spend a few days with Toni. You can all go to the theatre together in the evening. She really is a good soul and is touchingly attentive to me, as is her entire family. She even sent me a whole lot of *cream-cheese tarts* [*Kolatschen*] recently.

If you come, don't forget to bring my photographs with you—I need them very much. The letter to Feld² came to my house all right, but when I read it over again, I realised how *fruitless* it would be, and that Ludwig would only awaken a *vain* hope. If Feld were in Vienna, I would have sent it to him anyway, but I am afraid that, in his optimism, he would travel straight to Budapest, and toss money away unnecessarily. This *certainly would not do*. With the *best* of intentions, I am not now in any position to help him *materially*. But rest assured, dear Poldi, I am thinking about it, and as soon as an *opportunity* presents itself, I will do *everything* in my power. I herewith invite you to come and visit me for a few weeks if the *time* arises that you need a *rest*. Perhaps we'll think of something together then. Write me soon.³

What is *Justi* doing, and why does she not write me?

And what about *Alois* and *Otto*? So many friends—and none are to be stirred!

Best wishes to you all
from Gustav

Now I'm off to the theatre.

SHELFMARK: E13-MF-538

NOTES

¹ Unknown, but apparently a family friend living in Prague.

² Apparently the father of Jenny Perrin-Feld, former owner of the 1893 manuscript of the First Symphony; see HLG I, pp. 93–94, n. 19; 153; and 966. A letter from her son to Alfred Rosé, dated 2 July 1968, sheds further light on this friendship:

As a young girl, my Hungarian-born mother, Jenny Feld, and her sister and brother lived in Vienna around 1880 for the sake of their education. The siblings' musical talents were overseen by a young Conservatory student named Gustav Mahler, who was taken in as a member of the family, as happened then. The good friendship lasted, despite the varying course of their lives. The family moved to Budapest and then, lo-and-behold, Mahler went to Budapest and the old friendship resumed—all the more since he brought his sister Justi, your mother, with him. A close friendship joined the two until my mother married my father, an American, in 1892. It continued via correspondence, first in Italy and eventually, in 1894, in Belgium. I think that I remember that your mother accompanied your brother to Hamburg; at any rate, he came to Brussels a few times and even spent a few days with us. In 1901 we moved to Vienna and the old friendship with your mother resumed. (Gustav Mahler–Alfred Rosé Collection)

³ Although E13-MF-538 ends here, unsigned, a short fragment found with E19-MJ-653 almost certainly forms the conclusion and is appended here.

❧ II *To Parents*

[Prague, October 1885]

Dear Mother and Father,

I am sending you 10 fl. right away, dear Mother, and promise to send the other 10 fl. next month.

I now have more to do here than before. *Meistersinger* on the 25th will really be something.

When will one of you come and visit me? Can't you come, dear mother? It might be a nice rest if you were here for a week. You could stay with Toni, and you would have all the care that you need—she is really an extremely nice person. Mind you, I get around to visiting her only rarely.

But why do you write so little?

I generally associate with Hellmann¹ from Iglau—we always lunch together.

From Cassel I hear that life isn't a bed of roses for my successor.² I am still much spoken about. In the meantime, I ask you to write me right away and tell me that this letter has arrived.

With best wishes,
Your
Gustav

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-52

NOTES

¹ Unknown.

² According to *Gustav Mahler in Kassel*, p. 53, Mahler's successor was twenty-eight-year-old Franz Beier, "an active, experienced musician."

❧ 12 To Parents

[Prague, November 1885]

Dear Mother and Father,

Today I can give you the welcome news that Director Neumann has begun negotiations regarding the extension of my contract.¹ Since we are both sharp fellows, the matter may take some time.—In the meantime, I am rehearsing and conducting "Meistersinger," "Rheingold," "Walküre," and "Tristan" here, and my career has taken a great upturn.²—As you can see, everything has turned out better than we might have hoped.—I will not accept *less* than 250 fl. a month and also have requested a month off each year, which he will probably give me.

Anyway, I will now begin to earn money. When now you come to see me sometime, you should have more enjoyment.

How are you feeling, dear mother? And all the others? Thank dear Justi for her letter, which I will answer sometime when I have a chance.

Write me again soon!
Best wishes from your
Gustav

I am moving into private quarters on 15 November.

SHELFMARK: E17-MF-627

NOTES

¹ These negotiations came to naught, as Mahler was unable to free himself from his commitment to the Leipzig Neues Stadt-Theater (see his letter of 3 December to Fritz Löhr, GMB² 42).

² Mahler conducted the Prague premieres of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre* on 19 and 20 December 1885. His colleague Ludwig Slansky gave the Prague premiere of *Tristan und Isolde* on 30 April 1886; Mahler conducted it for the first time in Hamburg, on 18 May 1891.

❧ 13 *To Parents*

[Prague, early December 1885]

Dear Mother and Father,
Just a few lines!

I've just been in bed again for a few days because of my damned haemorrhoids.¹ Because of them, the Nibelungen have had to be postponed again.—At any rate, I still hope to put them on this month. Then I hope to have some time. Maybe I'll come and visit on the way through.

Today was my first rehearsal back.

Best wishes from your
Gustav

How are things with you?

Write soon!

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-53

NOTE

¹ This is the first of many references in the letters to Mahler's various ills and infirmities. The chapter "Der kranke Mahler—eine pathographische Skizze," in Jens Malte Fischer, *Gustav Mahler: Der fremde Vertraute* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 2003), pp. 394–408, gives an excellent overview of Mahler's health. See also Susan M. Filler, "Mahlers Krankheiten in der Medizinischen Literatur," *Nachrichten zur Mahler-Forschung* 23 (1990): 7–13.

❧ 14 *To Parents*

[Prague, 1885–1886]

Dear Mother and Father,

Since I am very busy, I can only be quick.—Tomorrow Neumann comes back from Berlin. Only then can I conclude how I will arrange my itinerary. At the same time, I am sending you some clippings that you may not have yet read.

By the way, there were notices of varying lengths in all the Viennese papers. Write soon. Best wishes

from your
Gustav

[written across the top of the letter:] There were also articles in all the Berlin papers!

SHELFMARK: E2-MF-69

❧ I5 *From Marie Mahler to Gustav*

B. MAHLER, IGLAU
 MAKER OF LIQUEURS, RUM, ROSOGLIO, PUNCH, ESSENCES,
 AND VINEGAR

Iglau, 3.3.1886

My dear Gustav!

At your father's request, I am asking you to go to Uncle Weiner¹ as soon as you receive this letter, and to console him on the sudden death of your aunt. At such a misfortune, all quarrels and enmity cease. Please convey deepest sympathy to your uncle from us as well. We are all well. We read Director Neumann's letter in the Bohemia.² Did he write it to you, or simply send it to the paper? Write us about everything soon, and in detail.

Please, dear Gustav, *once again*, go right away. Fond farewell, and best wishes from your faithful mother

Marie

Dr. Freund visits us often, and I am awfully glad about this, since the talk is mostly about Gustav, of course. He is perhaps the best of your friends, apart from us.

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S3

NOTES

¹ This was an uncle on Mahler's mother's side.

² 1 March 1886. The rather flattering letter appeared after he and Mahler had had a violent disagreement about the ballet in Gounod's *Faust*.

❧ I6 *From Bernhard Mahler to Gustav*

Karlsbad, 6.5.86

Dear Gustav!

I will get straight to the point, since I have a lot of correspondence here.

Although there has been no further trace of sugar since my third day here, until today I have had severe *inflammation of the kidneys* and my cure has been hindered a lot by the bad weather.

Since my arrival, my way of living is that apart from when I go out to eat at midday, I hardly ever leave my room and at night am already in bed by 7:30. Accordingly, it is quite impossible to meet anyone, for it will not occur to anyone to come to me in my room. So there is nothing else to be done other than to be patient and comfort myself with the thought that there are others here who are even worse off.

With best wishes,
 your father
 B. Mahler

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S4

❧ 17 *From Justine to Gustav*

Iglau, 9 May [1886]

Dear Gustav!

I have been meaning to write you for ages, but with the best will in the world, it has not been possible since we have been continually busy with home redecorating since your departure. Did you write to dear father already? He wrote us that his condition is highly satisfactory, however he did suffer a lot with the bad weather. You hardly write to us anymore. Do you have a lot to do? There is certainly no new opera in prospect now, so you will be able to recuperate a little bit. I am already really looking forward to July when you will be at home again. Your visit will compensate me for many deprivations I have had to impose on myself. I have only been out walking twice since dear father has been away, since dear mother was prevented from going with me by painful feet and too much work. Yesterday we had a letter from dear Leopoldine. She complains a lot that you have never replied to any of the letters that she has written you. If you wanted, you could congratulate her on her birthday on the 18th of this month, since she has never failed to do so on yours, and you cannot imagine how much that would please her. I will close for today with my best wishes.

Your faithful
Sister

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S5

❧ 18 *From Marie Mahler to Gustav*

Iglau, 31.5.86

Dear Gustav!

Only today am I able to send you a few lines. Dear father has been home since Tuesday and is feeling quite well, God be praised. Only he still has to take things very easy and above all avoid anger and agitation—which is hard to do in a business. But we are pleased with him, and the doctor holds out the best for him.

Incidentally, there is nothing at all of note to report. How are things with you, dear Gustav. Will you be coming home in July, then? I am writing now with great reluctance and so will close with best wishes and kisses to you from all of us—

Your
faithful mother
Marie

SOURCE: Alma Mahler, "Ein Leben mit Gustav Mahler" (unpublished manuscript in the Bibliothèque Musicale Gustav Mahler); *Selected Letters* S6