



## A memorable musical experience

### **On his new album Jonas Kaufmann sings both solo parts of Gustav Mahler's *Song of the Earth***

Has there ever been a performance of Mahler's *Song of the Earth* in which both solo parts were sung by the same vocalist? Probably not, or at least not involving any of the great singers of the last 100 years. And certainly not on any of the 120 or so available recordings. The work, which was posthumously premiered in Munich in 1911, was described by Mahler as a "symphony for tenor, alto (or baritone) and orchestra". It follows that two soloists have featured in every recording to date: either tenor and baritone or tenor and alto/mezzo soprano.

Jonas Kaufmann is the first soloist to be heard singing both parts. The recording will be released by Sony Classical on April 7.

The three tenor songs alone pose quite a challenge, particularly the opening "Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde" (Drinking Song of Earth's Misery). What inspired Jonas Kaufmann to take on the three lower-pitched songs too?

*"During performances I've often wondered why one needs two singers for these six songs. Of course, there are powerful contrasts between the songs and also clear differences in terms of their vocal tessitura. In spite of this, I was attracted by the idea of framing these six songs – despite all their differences – within a single overarching structure extending from the first song to the last. Also, I'm so fond of the songs for lower voice that during performances I get very jealous when listening to my baritone or mezzo colleagues, especially with regard to the final song, 'Der Abschied'. So I've always toyed with the idea of one day singing all six songs."*

This idea took shape in June last year: in the tradition-steeped Great Hall of the Vienna Musikverein, where a number of outstanding Mahler performances have taken place, Jonas Kaufmann joined the Vienna Philharmonic under Jonathan Nott in a performance of *Song of the Earth* that was subsequently broadcast live.

"We can report that this experiment went far beyond the risky test phase and, in the end, became a complete work of art in itself," according to an article in the *Kurier* newspaper after the performance. "Such an experiment would normally be considered pretentious but is absolutely logical in the case of Kaufmann, who is thus able to showcase the splendour of his baritone as well as the radiant upper reaches of his range. Besides the enormous amount of energy that went into the performance, which is commendable in itself, the concert with the Vienna Philharmonic under the baton of Jonathan Nott proved to be a memorable

experience of music and lyricism. Even the second song 'Der Einsame im Herbst' (The Solitary One in Autumn), which is written for baritone, was sung so touchingly by Jonas Kaufmann that the audience gave gentle applause between the verses. Drawing on brilliant cantilenas, excellent diction and intonation and exemplary phrasing, Kaufmann gave his own original account of the entire work."

What Jonas Kaufmann found most intriguing in the project was the final song, which is the most poignant of them all. This composition by Mahler was influenced by the loss of his daughter Maria Anna, who died of diphtheria at four years of age. This tragedy was compounded when Mahler was forced to resign as director of the Vienna Opera and, not long afterwards, was diagnosed with a severe heart condition. Against this backdrop it is clear why this final song bears the title "Abschied" (Farewell) and contains a funeral march. But Kaufmann sees it as more than just an expression of sorrow and pain:

"The final passage, with its harps and celesta and its repetition of the word 'ewig' (forever), has something redemptive about it: angels are bearing the soul to Paradise. To that extent I hear consolation and hope here. True, I also sense a certain melancholy but basically I feel relaxed, reassured and liberated after the final notes of 'Der Abschied'."

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## Gustav Mahler: Das Lied von der Erde (*The Song of the Earth*)

After Hans Bethge's *Die chinesische Flöte*

- I. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde
- II. Der Einsame im Herbst
- III. Von der Jugend
- IV. Von der Schönheit
- V. Der Trunkene im Frühling
- VI. Der Abschied

Jonas Kaufmann *tenor/baritone*  
Vienna Philharmonic  
Jonathan Nott *conductor*