Music fans to remember when Mahler was here

Today in Clinton Square, music lovers will gather to recall another snowy day when Syracuse enjoyed a rare treat. It was 100 years ago when conductor and composer Gustav Mahler brought the New York Philharmonic on a six-stop Great Lakes tour and presented a historic performance at Syracuse’s Wieting Opera House.

The performance hall is gone, but near where it sat, on Clinton Square, a granite bench will be dedicated today to Mahler’s visit. This evening, a concert is planned.
When Syracuse made MUSIC HISTORY

INNOVATIVE COMPOSER AND CONDUCTOR GUSTAV MAHLER'S 1910 VISIT WITH NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC TO BE COMMENORATED TODAY IN CLINTON SQUARE

By Melinda Johnson • Arts editor

Turn back the clock 100 years to this day. Syracuse was cloaked in 4 inches of snow. Conductor and composer Gustav Mahler and the New York Philharmonic stepped off the train after having performed in Rochester on the evening of Dec. 8.

The conductor and his 85 musicians were nearing the end of their six-stop Great Lakes tour, which began in Pittsburgh, followed by Cleveland, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Utica.

A concert was scheduled for Friday evening at the Wieting Opera House. The performance hall, which was demolished in 1950, sat on the southern side of Water Street on what is now Clinton Square.

The program featured Bach, Beethoven and Wagner. Mahler not only conducted but was soloist. He sat at a Steinway piano, reconfigured as a harpsichord, facing the audience and performed his arrangement of Bach's Suite for Orchestra.

The critic for the Syracuse Herald wrote: "From the musical point of view, the orchestral concert of the New York Philharmonic society at the Wieting last night, will rank among the great successes of its kind in the musical history of Syracuse."

This momentous occasion will not go unremembered on the 100th anniversary. On a similarly snowy Syracuse day, music lovers and history buffs will converge on Clinton Square at 12:30 p.m. today to dedicate a bench commemorating Mahler's visit as a performer and conductor.

Mahler aficionado Hamilton Armstrong, of Manlius, is underwriting the purchase of the granite bench and its dedication.

TODAY'S EVENTS

A formal ceremony will be today at Clinton Square to mark the 100-year anniversary of conductor Gustav Mahler and the New York Philharmonic's concert in Syracuse. WCNY-FM also has planned an afternoon of programs.

Here is the schedule for today's activities:

12:06 p.m. on WCNY-FM (91.3): Writer Norman Lebrecht will discuss the importance of Gustav Mahler and talk about his recent book, "Why Mahler? How One Man and Ten Symphonies Changed Our World."

12:30 p.m.: Dedication of the Gustav Mahler bench will be held in the warming room of the Clinton Square Ice Rink because of the weather. (Enter the rear entrance of the Atrium Building at 2 Clinton Square.) WCNY's announcer Bill Baker will be master of ceremonies. Gregg Tripoli, executive director of Onondaga Historical Association, and Daniel Hege, music director of Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, will speak. It also will be broadcast live on WCNY-FM.

1 p.m. on WCNY-FM: Henry Fogel, vice president and program director of former classical music station WONO in Syracuse from 1963 to 1978, will introduce music selections along with commentary on Mahler. The program will follow the order of compositions performed by Mahler and the New York Philharmonic on Dec. 9, 1910, in Syracuse. Mahler's tenure with the orchestra predates live recordings, instead WCNY is substituting recordings from several orchestras, conducted by renowned conductors.

Musical program:


Wagner, Prelude and "Liebestod" from "Tristan and Isolde." Performed by the Philharmonica Orchestra, conducted by Otto Klemperer (1960).

Wagner, "Siegfried Idyll." Performed by the German Opera Orchestra, conducted by Christian Thielemann (1999).

Wagner, Prelude to "Die Meistersinger." Performed by the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam, conducted by Willem Mengelberg (1940).
**ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT**

**Mahler Concert in Syracuse: Part of His Vision**

Conductor had radical idea: take orchestra on road trips

**FRIDAY EVENING, DECEMBER 9th**

**The Philharmonic Orchestra of New York**

The following review appeared in the Syracuse Herald on Dec. 10, 1910, under the headline “Grand Concert of the New York Philharmonic.” Its spelling and punctuation are as they appeared in the original.

From the musical point of view, the orchestral concert of the New York Philharmonic society at Syracuse last night will rank among the great successes of its kind in the musical history of Syracuse. As a business enterprise, it is said to be a success, but a spectacular claim cannot be made for it. An entertainment of this superlative character deserved a crowded house." As it was, the audience was of only moderate size, say, of the third-night standard for a popular play. For this the blame cannot fairly be laid to the music-lovers of Syracuse, who on two occasions last year filled the house to the full. It must rather be charged to an error of judgment in the part of the management of the Philharmonics, that established a scale of prices that made it difficult for many of the music-lovers of Syracuse, that at once excited resentment and repelled patrons. The advantage of the situation for the admission, a reasonable one even for so grand a performance at the Philharmonic Hall of Syracuse, the seating capacity of the opera house would probably have been easily filled.

From the pecuniary viewpoint, it was an unwise venture, ventures into a darkly tempting road. But this was the only subject for regret or adverse criticism. The musical concert that will long be re- called with profound pleasure by the many and the few who were privileged to hear it.

No small part of the public interest aroused by the appearance of the New York Philharmonic orchestra was directed to its famous conductor. Herr Mahler is short in stature and slight in build, and seemingly the result of years of nervous energy; yet he is less eccentric in motion and livid in gestures, and more subdued in manner than of his rank. One would say that his magnetic influence over the orchestra is in inverse ratio to that of the physical man, for his leadership is clear in thought, simple and direct, and demonstrative. His orchestra displayed a wonderful breadth of expression that has appeared here in recent years, not only in the suppression of instrumental voices and the more marked preponderance of string over wind, but also in a finer unison of texture, and, as for example, in the rigorous unison-keeping of the strings between the first and second violins. Herr Mahler’s strings are a magnificent augmentation of trained performers, and their work is perhaps the best example ever furnished in Syracuse of the unequalled adaptability of the king of instruments for all variations of musical expression.

The program was something more than a classical feast. It was, in a broader aspect, a historic review — an educational study of orchestral composition in three stages of its development. The first number took the auditors back two centuries, to the days of Old Johann Sebastian Bach, who with his harpsichord and strings and double-reed instruments, the primitives of the bassoon and bassoons, laid the foundation of the present-day orchestra. From two of Bach’s earlier compositions of this class, his F-major Brandenburg Concerto No. 1, we entered in the suite for modern orchestra, which delighted the ears of his listeners last night with its archaic simplicity and touches of real genius, the whole quaint effect heightened by his own performance on the harpsichord.

Between the dates of Bach’s compositions and the golden age of the Shakespeare of music nearly a century elapsed, and the spirit of the Beethoven’s “Pastoral Sym- phony,” “played last night, as the critic on December 9, 1910, the theology and beauty of the na- med as well as in the chro- nological order, reveals to us the perfect fruit of that mas- ter’s inspired faculty of musi- cal invention. Beethoven al- ways protested that his symphonies were intended to be suggestive rather than defi- nitely descriptive in their awakening of emotions, and the distinction he thus makes is admirably illustrated by his Fifth symphony, indicative of Fate knocking at the door. Yet the Pastoral symphony, both in the adante and the final movement, is in an appreciable degree real delineative music, with its subtle imitations of some of the nature’s voices and its stirring simulation of the swell and break of a summer storm. But the master’s power of suggestion has full scope, too, in its instrumental reflection of the glory and re- pose of the picturesque coun- try-side and of the tenues- ment of rustic life.

The three Wagner numbers of the programme, bringing us fifty years nearer to our own day, and representing the last important work in orchestral evolution, completed the historic retrospective. They were grouped with superb judgment to illustrate the intimate connection the Wagner contribution to music art — its tragedy, its ro- mancy, its nobility in sentiment. In his interpretation of Wag- ner, the orchestra was techni- cally at its best. It was a brilli- ant example of artistry, and the size of the audience in the Hall was no doubt largely due to the experience of Herr Mahler’s desire. The public in general could not have guessed what genius was in the orchestra. It was a new experience for many of us last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future. The conductor’s vision of the day when orchestras will travel and perform in towns and cities throughout the country, as in the past few years, is probably still a vision in the future. But this was an experience which will be remembered by many of us who were present last night, and we are sure there will be a second concert in the near future.