

# **UNDOING A “TRAGIC” MISTAKE**

## **DETERMINING THE INNER-MOVEMENT ORDER OF MAHLER’S SIXTH SYMPHONY**

**A critical examination of the evidence**

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New York City

October 19th, 2002

A publication of  
**THE KAPLAN FOUNDATION**

450 Park Avenue  
New York City

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## I. OVERVIEW

Nearly a century has passed since Gustav Mahler composed his Sixth Symphony, yet confusion still persists among conductors, scholars and biographers regarding the order of its inner movements. Mahler began work on the symphony in 1903, first composing a Scherzo and an Andante as the central pair of its eventual four-movement structure, framing them with the remaining movements the following year. He then reversed this “S-A” order of inner movements before the symphony’s premiere in 1906, and thereafter never reverted to their previous arrangement. It was not until 1919, almost a decade after Mahler’s death, that the conductor Willem Mengelberg queried Mahler’s widow about the order of these inner movements. Her response: “First Scherzo, then Andante” prompted him to alter the “A-S” order of his conductor’s score, igniting a controversy that has spanned the decades since.

With the publication in 1963 of the first Critical Edition of the Sixth by the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft (IGMG), the matter seemed settled at last. In his introduction, IGMG founder-editor Erwin Ratz stated that the thematic similarities between the symphony’s opening movement and its Scherzo, commented upon during rehearsals for its premiere, had prompted Mahler to succumb to the advice of “outside influences” to transpose the Sixth’s inner movements. Ratz claimed that Mahler soon realized his mistake but, due to “an oversight of the publisher,” the printed score was never corrected.<sup>1</sup> Ratz offered no evidence to support his contention, but the cachet of a “Critical Edition” effectively mandated the “Scherzo-Andante” ordering of these movements,<sup>2</sup> altering performance practice of the Sixth up to the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> “Bedauerlicherweise wurde jedoch durch ein Versehen des Verlages der Partitur kein entsprechender Hinweis beigegeben, so daß immer Unklarheit über die von Mahler gewünschte Reihenfolge herrschte.” Erwin Ratz, ed., *Revisionsbericht* for the IGMG’s Critical Edition of Gustav Mahler, *Symphonie Nr. 6* (Lindau: C.F. Kahnt, 1963).

<sup>2</sup> One of the few dissenting voices was that of the British musicologist Deryck Cooke, best known for his performing version of Mahler’s incomplete Tenth Symphony, who criticized Ratz’s arguments on both musical and factual grounds. Deryck Cooke, *Gustav Mahler: An Introduction to His Music* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 1.

Swept along by the resurgence of interest in Mahler's music, performers and public alike bowed to received wisdom and embraced the Critical Edition as gospel. With few exceptions, conductors adopted this "S-A" inner-movement order when performing and recording the Mahler Sixth,<sup>3</sup> while biographers, program annotators and the musical public at large were led to believe that any lingering doubts about Mahler's final intentions had now been laid to rest.

Since that time, mindful of new discoveries and advances in musical scholarship, the IGMG has been updating its *Gesamtausgabe* (Complete Edition). Among its recent releases is a revised Critical Edition of the Sixth.<sup>4</sup> In its *Vorwort*,<sup>5</sup> while acknowledging the preponderance of evidence supporting the "A-S" order of the Sixth's inner movements, the IGMG nevertheless opted to retain the "S-A" order decreed by Erwin Ratz in 1963.

As a result of the IGMG's resolute reaffirmation of the earlier edition's position, disregarding the accumulated body of clearly contradictory evidence, concert audiences of today share the same fate as a previous generation: namely, **hearing Mahler's Sixth Symphony with its inner movements played in the wrong order.**

When the accretions of misunderstanding and misinformation are stripped away, it is clear that no credible evidence has emerged to justify performances of the Sixth "S-A," with its "Scherzo" movement preceding the "Andante."

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<sup>3</sup> Among the conductors who did hold fast to their convictions were Norman Del Mar, Berthold Goldschmidt, Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Simon Rattle, and Harold Farberman (commercially available recorded performances of the last three will be cited).

<sup>4</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphonie Nr. 6*, revised Critical Edition, ed. Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft, Wien (Frankfurt: C.F. Kahnt, 1998). This edition of the score was not actually available until early in 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Its credited author is Gunnar Sundberg. This *Vorwort* is followed by a *Revisionsbericht* by the late Karl Heinz Füssl, and finally by a *Schlusswort* by the IGMG's current Editor-in-Chief of the Complete Critical Edition, Dr. Reinhold Kubik.

## II. SUMMARIZING THE ARGUMENT

The currently available evidence, which supports the “A-S” order of inner movements, is that:

- ◆ *All of Mahler’s own performances* of his Sixth Symphony, *without exception*, had its “Andante” precede the “Scherzo.”<sup>6</sup>
- ◆ *All other performances* of the Sixth during Mahler’s lifetime,<sup>7</sup> and for almost a decade thereafter, observed his “Andante-Scherzo” order.
- ◆ *No record exists* of any written or verbal instruction by Mahler to his friends, associates, other conductors, or to his publishers, that indicate he ever intended to revert to the original order of these movements.<sup>8</sup>

In view of these facts, one might wonder how Mahler’s intentions could ever have been misconstrued. In fact, the tale has twists and turns worthy of a detective novel. These will be unraveled, and the “culprits” identified, as the real story unfolds.

## III. EARLY STAGES OF COMPOSITION AND FIRST PUBLICATION

As most biographers agree, Mahler began work on his Sixth in the summer of 1903 at his lakeside villa near Maiernigg, in the southern Austrian province of Carinthia. By the time it was necessary for him to return to his administrative and conducting duties at the Vienna *Hofoper*, Mahler had completed the *Particell* of the Sixth Symphony’s two inner movements and sketched its opening Allegro.

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<sup>6</sup> Essen, May 27, 1906 (premiere)  
Munich, November 8, 1906  
Vienna, January 4, 1907

<sup>7</sup> Berlin, October 8, 1906, conductor Oskar Fried (with Mahler in attendance)  
Munich, November 14, 1906, conductor Bernhard Stavenhagen  
Leipzig, March 11, 1907, conductor Hans Winderstein  
Dresden, April 5, 1907, conductor Ernst von Schuch (Mvts. 2 and 3 only)

<sup>8</sup> Eight years after Mahler’s death, his widow Alma did respond to a query from Willem Mengelberg, reversing the order of these movements. Later, when writing about the Sixth in her memoirs, she reverted to the “A-S” order.

The following summer he completed the opening Allegro movement and composed the Sixth's extensive Finale.<sup>9</sup> When he had finished, he played the entire work through for Alma on the piano. "We both wept that day," she recalled.<sup>10</sup> Alma made no mention of the order of its movements, but their position in the autograph score suggests that Mahler initially planned the Scherzo to be the Sixth's second movement, with the Andante placed third.<sup>11</sup>

With the draft of the Sixth's Finale completed on August 18<sup>th</sup>, 1904, Mahler could report to his friend Arnold Berliner on September 9<sup>th</sup> that "my Sixth is finished."<sup>12</sup> That winter Mahler worked on its orchestration, so that by May 1<sup>st</sup> of 1905, he was ready to entrust the autograph full score to a copyist.<sup>13</sup> This "fair copy"<sup>14</sup> was sent that autumn to Mahler's new publisher, C.F. Kahnt of Leipzig.<sup>15</sup> Kahnt then set to work preparing the publication of three scores: a large folio-format conducting score, a smaller quarto-sized "study score," and a full-size four-hand piano reduction that Kahnt had commissioned from the composer

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<sup>9</sup> Eduard Reeser, *Gustav Mahler und Holland* (Vienna: Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft, 1980), 82, 84.

<sup>10</sup> Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters*, 4th ed., ed. Donald Mitchell and Knud Martner, trans. Basil Creighton (London: Cardinal, 1990), 70.

<sup>11</sup> The title page of each of these movements bears a Roman numeral to establish its position in the symphony ("II. Scherzo" and "III. Andante"). Mahler later crossed out these numerals and renumbered the pages "III. Scherzo" and "II. Andante." It is not clear when he reordered these inner movements in the autograph score.

<sup>12</sup> Knud Martner, ed., *Selected Letters of Gustav Mahler*, trans. Eithne Wilkins, Ernst Kaiser and Bill Hopkins (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), 280.

<sup>13</sup> Alma Mahler, 261. In a footnote referring to Mahler's letter to her of June 13<sup>th</sup>, 1905, Alma claims to have copied the Sixth Symphony. If that is true, this copy has not survived. The manuscript used by Kahnt to engrave the first edition (*Stichvorlage I*) was made by a professional copyist, with Mahler's corrections appended.

<sup>14</sup> In his description of this score, Hans Peter Jülg states that Mahler re-inverted its already-corrected "A-S" order of movements to "S-A," but an examination of this score in the IGMG archives does not support his claim. *Gustav Mahlers Sechste Symphonie* (Munich: Musikverlag Emil Katzwichler, 1986), 30.

<sup>15</sup> Mahler signed the contract with C.F. Kahnt on August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1905.

Alexander Zemlinsky, a close friend of both Gustav and Alma.<sup>16</sup> Kahnt also engaged the musicologist and pedagogue Richard Specht to prepare a “Thematic Analysis” of the Sixth to accompany the study and piano score as a guide to concertgoers and students who would be encountering the symphony for the first time. All three scores and Specht’s guide were ready in time for the premiere.<sup>17</sup> That event was to be the concluding concert of a week-long music festival of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein* (German Music Association) held that May in Essen. Earlier that month Mahler, who had formerly been Principal Conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic, had asked that orchestra as a favor to read through the score.<sup>18</sup> They agreed, and Mahler at last got to hear and experience his Sixth in full orchestral garb.<sup>19</sup>

#### IV. REHEARSALS AND ESSEN PREMIERE

Just when it was that Mahler began to entertain doubts about the order of the Sixth’s inner movements is not clear. Possibly he experimented during that reading in Vienna or even earlier, but certainly later while rehearsing the Sixth in Essen prior to its premiere. Klaus Pringsheim, already at 23 a vocal coach at the Vienna Opera, greatly admired Mahler and was pleased to be asked to accompany him to Essen. He assisted at the rehearsals and later recalled Mahler’s experimenting with the order of these movements while feverishly making alterations in the symphony’s orchestration.<sup>20</sup> Mahler’s initial indecision is evident from the timings of these movements noted on the title page of his conducting score in blue pencil (Plate I). Here, the “A-S” timings of the inner

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<sup>16</sup> On April 17, 1906, Mahler wrote to Zemlinsky suggesting that they meet the following evening to play through the latter’s four-hand piano reduction of the Sixth. Martner 1979, 288.

<sup>17</sup> The conducting and study scores were available in March; Zemlinsky’s 4-hand piano reduction and the Specht booklet appeared at the beginning of May.

<sup>18</sup> James Deaville, “The C.F. Kahnt Archive in Leipzig: A Preliminary Report,” *Notes* 42, no. 3 (March 1986): 513.

<sup>19</sup> Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Gustav Mahler*, vol. 3, *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904-1907)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 402.

<sup>20</sup> Klaus Pringsheim, “Zur Uraufführung von Mahlers Sechster Symphonie,” *Musikblätter des Anbruch* 2, no. 14 (1920): 496-498.

movements are overwritten with those corresponding to “S-A” (the timing of the Finale is altered as well). Since these two sets of timings are radically different from those of the Essen premiere<sup>21</sup> they must have been taken during rehearsals, as Mahler did not conduct from this score again.

Mahler conducted the first performance of his Sixth Symphony on May 27, 1906, following a week of intensive rehearsals with the festival orchestra. Alma, who arrived in Essen in time for the final rehearsal, describes in her biography of Mahler his agitation preceding the performance. Curiously, when later writing about the Sixth Symphony, Alma makes no mention of Mahler’s indecision about the order of its movements. Nor does she ever refer to Mahler’s deletion of the last of the three *Hammerschlagen* (hammer blows) that Mahler had initially added to the work’s Finale, although she gives free rein to her interpretation of their dread import.<sup>22</sup>

Following the final rehearsal Mahler at last made the decision to exchange the positions of the Sixth's inner movements; the Andante would now precede the Scherzo. He requested that slips of paper be inserted into the printed programs to advise concertgoers that the order shown in their programs (and in the three scores published thus far) had been changed. Mahler's far-from-trivial decision would have far-reaching consequences.

## V. REVISIONS AND REPUBLICATION

After the concert, Mahler contacted his publisher to request that the scores Kahnt had already been selling for three months be updated. He asked that an erratum slip be inserted in all unsold copies of the three scores, to advise buyers that the inner movements were now reversed. Mahler further requested that Kahnt

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<sup>21</sup> The timings of Mahler’s Essen performance were 20-15-15-40, according to the *Musikalisches Wochenblatt* 37 no. 25 (June 21, 1906): 462.

<sup>22</sup> Alma Mahler, 100.

prepare new editions of the study and piano reduction scores, and of Specht's "Thematic Analysis" as well (Plate II).<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile, with the experience of the Essen rehearsals and premiere now behind him, Mahler set to work making extensive changes in the Sixth during his summer holiday. Before sending his conducting score to Kahnt to use as the engraver's model (*Stichvorlage II*) for their revised publication of the Sixth, Mahler reordered its inner movements from "S-A" to "A-S." Mahler's heavily marked score clearly indicates the changed order of movements (Plate III) as well as a number of refinements in orchestration.

Kahnt acceded to Mahler's demands; new study and four-hand piano scores were prepared with the inner movements reversed, while erratum slips were duly attached to unsold stock (Plate IV). For the folio score, not only did the page and rehearsal numbers for the inner movements have to be reordered, but Mahler's latest changes in orchestration had to be incorporated. This made it necessary for Kahnt to re-engage the plates used to print the full-size conductor's score, no doubt costing the publisher considerable additional time, effort and unanticipated expense.

In due course the new scores appeared and were distributed. Mahler's revisions in orchestration had been duly incorporated into the folio full score, while all three scores now had their inner movements in the new "A-S" order. One of the full scores (#7) went to Mahler's colleague and long-time supporter, Willem Mengelberg, in anticipation of an Amsterdam premiere of the Sixth with the

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<sup>23</sup> Guides other than Specht's were available around the time of the premiere. Ernst Otto Nodnagel wrote an article on the Sixth a few days before its premiere, in which he listed the movements in the "S-A" order. He wrote another article following the premiere, a form analysis which appeared (with musical examples) in *Die Musik* as part of a General Report on the Festival, noting the new "A-S" sequence of movements. Dr. Karl Weigl also wrote an analysis of the Sixth, again "A-S." Ernst Otto Nodnagel, "Gustav Mahlers A-moll Symphonie No. 6," *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 73, no. 21/22 (May 23, 1906): 465-467; "Sechste Symphonie in A-moll von Gustav Mahler," *Die Musik* 5, no. 16 (May 1906): 233-246. Karl Weigl, "Gustav Mahler / Sechste Symphonie / (A moll)," *Musikführer No. 320* (Berlin: Schlesinger'sche Musik-Bibliothek, undated).

Concertgebouw Orchestra. Meanwhile, Mahler had traveled to Berlin to hear another valued colleague, Oskar Fried, introduce the Sixth there.<sup>24</sup> A month later Mahler himself conducted the Sixth, this time in Munich (Plate V). A second performance a week later was conducted by Bernhard Stavenhagen after Mahler had been called back to Vienna. Both performances observed the revised “A-S” order of the inner movements.

## VI. THE VIENNA PREMIERE

With Kahnt’s revised scores now available, Mahler finally presented the Sixth to the Viennese on January 4, 1907.<sup>25</sup> In the wake of his switch of the Sixth’s inner movements, Mahler could now anticipate ridicule from an increasingly hostile press. Mounting criticism of what was perceived as Mahler’s autocratic demands as Director of the *Hofoper*, coupled with his frequent absences from Vienna to conduct his own works, had primed the pens of those already less than sympathetic to Mahler as man and musician.

The concert took place on January 4<sup>th</sup>, 1907. A total of fourteen reviewers reported the occasion; their press notices mirrored the reaction of a demonstrative if divided audience. Two of the reviewers claimed that Mahler had switched around the inner movements from the order printed in the program. However, their reports were at odds with a dozen other critics, who identified the movement order as agreeing with the concert program<sup>26</sup> (Plate VI).

One of the two dissenters, Heinrich Reinhardt (*Neues Wiener Journal*, January 5<sup>th</sup>, 1907), gave free rein to a sarcastic and savage attack on Mahler personally as well as professionally. Although he claimed that the Scherzo was heard as the second movement, his description of that music is so garbled that one is tempted to

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<sup>24</sup> Fried conducted the Berlin premiere (“A-S”) on October 15, 1906, with Mahler in attendance.

<sup>25</sup> This is the first appearance of the title “Tragic” on a concert program of the Mahler Sixth (Plate VI).

<sup>26</sup> Reinhold Kubik has compiled a list of citations from the IGMG archives, identifying 14 reviewers and 16 published reviews.

wonder if he had actually been present at the concert. The other “S-A” reviewer, Carl Lafite (*Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1907), does describe the music more recognizably, though not more charitably. Writers who seize upon these reviews as evidence of Mahler’s uncertainty about the order of the Sixth’s movements seem to be unaware of the overwhelming number of reports to the contrary from the majority of the critics, as well as of that published in the concert program.

In an insightful observation, Donald Mitchell has pointed out that critics, faced with conflicting assignments, have often based their reviews on the *Generalprobe* (dress rehearsal) instead of the concert itself. If Mahler had continued to experiment with the order of movements (or had simply exchanged or telescoped them in rehearsal in order to devote more time to problematic areas), this could account for the disorientation of Reinhardt’s description and the inverted movement order of both his and Lafite’s reviews.

Beyond such speculation, it is clear that Mahler once again — and, as it happened, for the last time — *did* conduct his Sixth Symphony with its Andante preceding its Scherzo. It is also apparent that the stage was now set for later confusion and misunderstanding, with the disagreement among reviewers compounding the disagreement between the available scores. Kahnt’s original and subsequent publications were unfortunately identical in outward appearance. All were dated “1906,” with no indication of which one had superseded the other. Both orchestral scores bore the same plate number, 4162; both scores of Zemlinsky’s piano reduction, plate number 4649.

## VII. FINAL CHANGES

Immediately after attending the Essen premiere, Willem Mengelberg had invited Mahler to conduct the Dutch premiere with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. They eventually agreed on January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1907, as the date, but just before the Vienna

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premiere, Mahler had to write Mengelberg that he was forced to postpone the event due to heightened pressures at the Opera. Despite Mahler's urging Mengelberg to conduct the Sixth in his stead, Mengelberg demurred, preferring to wait until another date could be found.<sup>27</sup> On January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1907, following the Vienna premiere, Mahler requested that Mengelberg send him his conducting score so that "a very important revision" in instrumentation could be incorporated into the Finale.<sup>28</sup> Mengelberg complied, and his score was then returned to him with Mahler's revision neatly entered in red ink. However, Mahler's mounting difficulties in Vienna, compounded by his accepting new commitments in America, continued to interfere with plans for a Dutch premiere. By the time he finally was able to return to Amsterdam in October of 1909, Mahler had composed two more symphonies. For that occasion he chose to premiere his latest purely orchestral symphony, the Seventh. He had told Mengelberg of this decision in a letter earlier that year, and in the same letter Mahler asked Mengelberg to send him his score of the Sixth once again, presumably so that he could enter some further changes.<sup>29</sup> This might account for the more extensive revisions made in Mengelberg's score, which go beyond the one that Mahler had originally recalled that score in order to make.<sup>30</sup>

Mengelberg's conducting score incorporates **Mahler's last known changes to the Sixth. The order of its middle movements remains unaltered by Mahler: "Andante-Scherzo."**

This was to be Mahler's last visit to Amsterdam and the Concertgebouw.

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<sup>27</sup> *Willem Mengelberg 1871-1951 Dirigent/Conductor* (The Hague: Haags Gemeentemuseum, 1995) 186-187.

<sup>28</sup> Martner 1979, 299.

<sup>29</sup> Letter from Willem Mengelberg to Mahler, postmarked July 6<sup>th</sup> 1909: "Für dießmal lassen wir noch die 6." ("Let us leave the Sixth for this time.") Reeser, 95. Further on, Mahler requests that Mengelberg send him his score of the Sixth: "Dahin bitte ich Sie auch, mir die Partitur der 6. zu schicken." ("I ask you please also to send me there [to Toblach] the score of the 6<sup>th</sup>.")

<sup>30</sup> Martner 1979, 299.

In 1910 Mahler signed a contract with Universal Edition not only to publish his newest works, but also to distribute his earlier scores, including those originally published by Kahnt. The Sixth Symphony was among them, but Mahler did not seize this opportunity to request that any change from the “A-S” order be indicated when Universal took over the distribution of the three scores.<sup>31</sup> In fact, it is **known that** Universal put their stamp on, and unknowingly distributed, some of the earlier “S-A” stock Kahnt had retired after republication had supposedly rendered them redundant. The implications of this are particularly interesting in the light of later events, since scores bearing the UE stamp might appear to indicate a later publication, further supporting the notion that Mahler had changed his mind yet again.

Mahler died in Vienna on May 18, 1911, without having either heard or conducted his Sixth again.

#### **VIII. PERFORMANCES AFTER 1911; MENGELBERG, ALMA, AND THE RETURN OF “S-A”**

After Mahler’s death, biographers such as Guido Adler, Paul Bekker, Richard Specht, and Paul Stefan, had no reason to question the “A-S” sequence of the Sixth’s inner movements. In 1916, Willem Mengelberg at last introduced the Mahler Sixth to Holland. The concert program shows the middle movements to have been Andante second, Scherzo third (Plate VII), in agreement with the score Mahler had corrected and returned to him twice before. This fact alone refutes any speculation that Mahler might have confided to Mengelberg that his intention was to revert to the earlier order of the Sixth’s inner movements. On October 15, 1919, Oskar Fried (who had introduced the Sixth to Berlin more than a dozen years before, with Mahler in the audience) conducted the Sixth Symphony in Vienna. The following year, as other festivals began to program

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<sup>31</sup> Letters between Mahler and his new publisher, the last as late as February, 1911, make no mention of the Sixth Symphony. Edward R. Reilly, “Gustav Mahler Sketches in the Moldenhauer Archives,” in *Music History from Primary Sources: A Guide to the Moldenhauer Archives*, ed. Jon Newsom and Alfred Mann (Washington: Library of Congress, 2000), 301-312.

Mahler's music,<sup>32</sup> Fried undertook a cycle of all of the Mahler symphonies (except the Eighth) in Vienna. On both occasions, Fried conducted the Sixth with its inner movements "Andante-Scherzo" (Plate VIII).

There seemed little reason to expect that performances of the Sixth would ever deviate from this order, or that today's audiences would ever have any reason to question that the movements of Mahler's Sixth Symphony were meant by its composer to be heard Allegro-Andante-Scherzo-Finale. But the seeds of doubt had been sown long before. They broke ground in October of 1919, a few months prior to an elaborate festival in Amsterdam planned by Rudolf Mengelberg, Willem's cousin and manager of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. It would include all of Mahler's published music with a program of lectures and symposia by leading authorities. Just who or what raised the question is unknown but -- despite his earlier performances of the Sixth with its "A-S" order of movements left untouched in the score that Mahler had corrected and returned to him in 1907 and 1909 -- Willem Mengelberg now became uncertain about the order of these movements. Possibly prompted by his musicologist cousin Rudolf, who may have shown him the earlier Kahnt score with the Scherzo as its second movement,<sup>33</sup> Mengelberg apparently decided to resolve the issue by consulting Mahler's widow. In a telegram dated October 1, 1919, Alma responded tersely: "*Erst Scherzo dann Andante herzlichst Alma.* ("First Scherzo, then Andante; cordially, Alma").<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Willem Mengelberg in Amsterdam, May 1920; Carl Schuricht in Wiesbaden, 1923; Klaus Pringsheim in Berlin, 1923-1924.

<sup>33</sup> On p. 77 of Mengelberg's conducting score, where the Andante begins, there is a neatly pencilled note (not in his hand): "*In der kl. Partitur folgt hier das Scherzo.*" ("In the small score the Scherzo comes here.")

<sup>34</sup> Karel Philippus Bernet-Kempers, "Mahler und Willem Mengelberg," in *Bericht über den Internationalen Musikwissenschaftlichen Kongress, Wien 1956* (Graz: Hermann Böhlaus, 1958), 45. A recent search of the Mengelberg Archive unaccountably failed to produce this telegram or any evidence that it had ever existed, although over a dozen other letters and telegrams from Alma to Mengelberg were meticulously catalogued.

Alma, at the best of times not the most reliable of reporters,<sup>35</sup> perhaps cannot be faulted for being a little confused herself. After all, she had first experienced the symphony 15 years earlier when Mahler played its first draft for her on the piano. The strength of that initial impression may have obscured later, less potent memories, especially considering the years in between and the social and political upheavals that had intervened by the time she received Mengelberg's inquiry. Paradoxically, in Alma's account of her life with Mahler which she began writing a year or so after sending the telegram, she identified the Scherzo as the *third* movement of the Sixth.<sup>36</sup> Despite the opportunity presented by her attendance at performances of the Sixth for half a century thereafter, Alma seems never to have chided a conductor for performing the Sixth "A-S." Which leaves us to wonder: Which Alma are we to trust?

Mengelberg, however, saw no reason to doubt his source. Upon receipt of Alma's telegram, with rehearsals for a performance of the Sixth on October 5<sup>th</sup> already in progress, he obediently scrawled across the title page of his conducting score (Plate IX) "Scherzo first, then Andante *according to Mahler's instruction*" (italics added).<sup>37</sup> Apparently satisfied that he had resolved the matter (Plates X, XI), Mengelberg performed the Sixth again a few months later

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<sup>35</sup> As La Grange himself has noted, in remarks found on the Internet web site <http://mapage.noos.fr/vincent/symph6.html>, "...au contraire de Nathalie Bauer-Lechner, Alma n'a jamais été un témoin très scrupuleux de la vie créatrice de son époux." ("...unlike Natalie Bauer-Lechner, Alma Mahler was never a very scrupulous observer of her husband's creative life.") An example of this can be found in the liner notes for the first recording of Mahler's Third Symphony (F. Charles Adler conducting the "Vienna Orchestra" on SPA 70/71). Alma describes in vivid detail the furnishings and surroundings of Mahler's composing *Häuschen* at Maiernigg as, inspired by Pan in the midday heat, he began work on his Third Symphony. In fact, Mahler had composed the Third at his lakeside cottage in Steinbach, long before summering in Maiernigg or having known Alma.

<sup>36</sup> Alma Mahler, 70. This clear identification of the *Scherzo* as the third movement remains unaltered in all editions of *Memories and Letters*. Initially entitled *Mein Leben mit Mahler*, the manuscript was eventually published as *Gustav Mahler: Erinnerungen und Briefe* (Albert de Lange: Amsterdam, 1940). It was translated into English by Basil Creighton and published in an abridged version as *Gustav Mahler: Memories and Letters* (John Murray, London, 1946). It was revised, enlarged and edited by Donald Mitchell in 1968. A further-expanded third edition appeared in 1973, followed by a fourth in 1990.

<sup>37</sup> "Nach Mahlers Angabe II erst Scherzo dann III Andante."

at the Amsterdam Mahler Festival. Either he or his cousin Rudolf<sup>38</sup> may have shared Alma's telegram with Paul Stefan, an invited lecturer at the Festival. Stefan did change the order of these movements in a later edition of his Mahler biography,<sup>39</sup> further muddying the waters. However, Richard Specht, another lecturer at the Festival, made no such change in his biography of the composer, which he had otherwise revised in 1925.

Mengelberg never again conducted the Sixth, but the much-quoted (and clearly misattributed) notation in his score has had far-reaching consequences. Cited more often than any other "evidence" in support of the "S-A" sequence, it is regarded by program annotators and others unfamiliar with the circumstances of its origin as incontrovertible proof that Mahler meant to revert to his earlier ordering of the Sixth's inner movements.

Nevertheless, most performances of the Sixth continued to observe the "A-S" order of its inner movements. Alexander Zemlinsky, whose four-hand piano score of the Sixth remained in print and who conducted the Sixth several times in Prague during the 1920s, "invariably played the *Andante* before the *Scherzo*," according to his recent biographer, Antony Beaumont.<sup>40</sup> As recordings of the Sixth began to appear, first that of F. Charles Adler with the Vienna Symphony in 1952,<sup>41</sup> then Eduard Flipse with the Rotterdam Philharmonic (recorded live on June 25, 1955 at the Holland Festival),<sup>42</sup> the "A-S" order was maintained. This

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<sup>38</sup> In *Gustav Mahler*, published in 1923, Rudolf Mengelberg identifies the inner-movement order of the Sixth as "S-A." He does not divulge his source. Rudolf Mengelberg, *Gustav Mahler* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1923), 56-57.

<sup>39</sup> Stefan initially accepted the "A-S" order in *Gustav Mahler: A Study of His Personality and Work* (New York: G. Schirmer, 1913), 108, but changed it to "S-A" in the 1920 edition, *Gustav Mahler: Eine Studie über Persönlichkeit und Werk* (Munich: R. Piper & Co. und Verlag, 1920), 131-133.

<sup>40</sup> Antony Beaumont, *Zemlinsky* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 288.

<sup>41</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*; Vienna Symphony Orchestra, conducted by F. Charles Adler, SPA Records SPA-59/60, 1953, on LP, and BMG/Conifer Records Ltd. 75605 51279 2, 1997, on CD.

<sup>42</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*; Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Eduard Flipse, Epic SC 6012, 1956, on LP. The late Russian pianist, Sviatoslav Richter, refers to this

was also the case with other live performances of that era that were broadcast and are now available. These include the July 12, 1955, Concertgebouw performance with Eduard van Beinum,<sup>43</sup> that of Dimitri Mitropoulos with the New York Philharmonic on April 10, 1955,<sup>44</sup> and Hermann Scherchen's October 4, 1960, Leipzig performance.<sup>45</sup>

## IX. THE "CRITICAL" EDITIONS

Among those who contributed to the latter-day re-inversion of movement order was the respected writer and critic Hans Ferdinand Redlich. In both the original and the revised editions of his *Bruckner & Mahler*,<sup>46</sup> Redlich had lauded Mahler's "A-S" decision to reverse the Sixth's inner movements as insightful. He later changed his mind when writing the introduction to the Eulenburg miniature score of the Sixth. He went so far as to conjecture that:

His intention to revert to the original sequence of movements as to reinstate the third hammer-stroke (possibly decided upon as late as 1910) was never incorporated in print because no further edition of the symphony was issued in his lifetime.<sup>47</sup>

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performance in a passage from his recently published memoirs: "But I beg you, I entreat you: the first movement should be followed by the Andante, not the Scherzo!! It's better like this!" Bruno Monsiegeon, *Sviatoslav Richter: Notebooks and Conversations*, trans. Stewart Spencer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 198.

<sup>43</sup> This is of particular interest, since van Beinum was Mengelberg's successor as conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra. For his performance van Beinum accepted the published score of the Sixth rather than adopt Mengelberg's Alma-instigated S-A "correction" to the order of its inner movements.

<sup>44</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*; New York Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos, Replica ARPL 32463, 1980, on LP; NYP Special Editions NYP 9806, 1998, on CD. However, he reversed the inner movements while preparing for a performance in Vienna on September 22, 1957. It would be surprising if Erwin Ratz, already a virulent opponent of the "A-S" order of movements, had not seized the opportunity to try to convince Mitropoulos that the change was justified. His subsequent concert on August 31, 1959 in Cologne (preserved on Fonit Cetra LP DOC 5, Hunt CD 522, and M&A CD-1021 "4 of 6"), kept this "S-A" order of movements.

<sup>45</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, Leipzig Radio Orchestra, conducted by Hermann Scherchen, Tahra TAR 110-11, 1994, on CD.

<sup>46</sup> Hans F. Redlich, *Bruckner & Mahler*, revised ed. (London: J.M. Dent, 1963).

<sup>47</sup> Redlich, ed., introduction to Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6* (Mainz: Ernst Eulenburg & Co., 1968), xxv.

Further on he states:

I feel certain that many of these variants [in the last version of the C.F. Kahnt score] would have been ultimately rejected – like the temporarily changed position of the middle movements and the cancelled third hammer-stroke – if Mahler had lived longer and had had further opportunities to hear the symphony in performance.<sup>48</sup>

Redlich offered no basis for his belief. Nor was he alone in attempting to solicit a wider audience for his privately held opinions.

In 1963, the recently formed IGMG produced a “Critical Edition” of the Sixth. Their founder and its editor, Erwin Ratz, unequivocally stated that Mahler had meant to revert to his original “S-A” order of movements, but offered no evidence whatsoever to back up his dictum. Now, after thirty-five years, the IGMG has issued its Revised Critical Edition of the Sixth.<sup>49</sup> In continuing to support its predecessor’s order of movements, the new Critical Edition based its entire defense of the “S-A” sequence on the inscription in the Mengelberg score, apparently unaware of its true origin.

Among others who persist in circulating the notion that Mahler not only was undecided about, but eventually intended to revoke, the “A-S” order of the Sixth’s inner movements, is the eminent Mahler biographer Henry-Louis de La Grange. In his liner notes for the Pierre Boulez recording of the Sixth, La Grange states: “[At Essen] Mahler probably allowed himself to be influenced by a number of his friends ... A few months later, in January 1907, *he decided to revert to the original order.*”<sup>50</sup> (italics added). Peter Franklin, author of an excellent short

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, xxvi.

<sup>49</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphonie Nr. 6*, 1998.

<sup>50</sup> Henry-Louis de La Grange, liner notes from Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Pierre Boulez, Deutsche Grammophon 445835-2, 1995, on CD. A more elaborate version currently appears on the previously two Internet web site, <http://mapage.noos.fr/vincent/symph6.html> (translated at <http://andante.com/profiles/Mahler/symph6.cfm>), devoted to a comprehensive listing of Mahler recordings. Appended to the discography of the Sixth Symphony is a commentary in which La Grange states that Mahler reverted to his original “S-A” order of movements during early rehearsals for the Vienna premiere, and afterward advised Mengelberg that this order was

biography of the composer, also authored the article on Mahler for the second edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.<sup>51</sup> He echoes Redlich's supposition that Mahler had decided shortly before his death to again reverse the inner movements of his Sixth. Evidently the passage of nearly a century has obscured, rather than clarified, Mahler's decision about the order of the inner movements of his A-minor symphony. Tragic, indeed!

## X. FINAL THOUGHTS

The issue of why Mahler decided to alter his original sequence for these movements lies beyond the scope of this paper. That he did so, recognizing the inconvenience and cost to his publisher and the embarrassment he would bring upon himself, suggests that this was no momentary whim but the inevitable outcome of a deeply felt conviction. If Mahler went to such lengths to reorder these movements, surely it is incumbent upon the professional societies, scholars and biographers who support the cause of his music, and in particular those who address this score as performers, to see to it that Mahler's final wishes are respected.

Despite the inertia of forty years of concerts and recordings, there still may be hope. Sir John Barbirolli remained adamant about the order of movements in his

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to be regarded as definitive from then on. Similar allegations are found in the second volume of his Mahler biography, *Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897-1904)*. Only with the publication of the third volume, *Vienna: Triumph and Disillusion (1904-1907)*, does La Grange finally substitute for these earlier misstatements of fact the query "Why would Alma lie?" to bolster his well-known personal preference for the "S-A" order of the Sixth's inner movements. However, relegated to a footnote (no. 50) on page 815, we encounter this startling claim: "Mahler's own score, *which he revised in the last year of his life* (italics added) has—for the time being perhaps—disappeared, but fortunately his alterations were copied by Willem Mengelberg into his conducting score, a *quarto copy of the second edition* (italics again added) with Andante 2/Scherzo 3." If the first part of this statement is true, La Grange cites no source for this information. The second part is additionally puzzling in that Mengelberg's conducting score is in full-sized folio format (Plate IX). Its changes in instrumentation, as already noted, were made by Mahler's copyist in 1907, and later, in 1909. Mengelberg's quarto-sized study score (see the reference to *kl. Partitur* reproduced on Plate X) obviously referred to Kahnt's earlier "S-A" edition, a size (17 cm x 24 cm) never intended for podium use.

<sup>51</sup> The revised *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., ed. Stanley Sadie and John Tyrrell (New York: Grove, 2001). Peter Franklin recently acknowledged to this researcher that he had most likely relied on H.F. Redlich's introduction to the Eulenburg miniature score (cited above).

performances and recordings,<sup>52</sup> and Sir Simon Rattle has both recorded and continues to perform the Sixth secure in his conviction that the inner movements must be heard "A-S."<sup>53</sup> An earlier version of this paper influenced the performances and recording of Glen Cortese with the Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra<sup>54</sup> as well as the performances of Leonard Slatkin with the National Symphony Orchestra.<sup>55</sup> Add to these the recent "A-S" performances by James Judd,<sup>56</sup> Leon Botstein,<sup>57</sup> and Mariss Jansons,<sup>58</sup> and we can dare to hope that Mahler may yet have the last word.

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<sup>52</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, the New Philharmonia Orchestra, conducted by Sir John Barbirolli. This studio recording from mid-August 1967 was first issued on LP as Angel Records SB-3725 and on Classics for Pleasure CFP 4424, then reissued twice more on CD by EMI. It was initially coupled with Richard Strauss's *Metamorphosen* (EMI CZS 7 67816 2, 1994). As on the LP, the inner movements were put in the "S-A" sequence in deference to the IGMG Critical Edition. After objections that Sir John never conducted the Sixth with its inner movements in that order, EMI recoupled the recording with Richard Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* (EMI 69349, 1996) and added this liner note: "The original LP release of this recording placed the *Scherzo* before the *Andante*. However, as it was Barbirolli's custom to perform the *Andante* before the *Scherzo*, as the composer originally intended (sic!), these two movements have been reordered for this CD reissue." Two later live performances by Sir John Barbirolli (both "A-S") were recorded and issued on CD, the first performed on January 13, 1966 with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra (Hunt CD 702, 1990), the other performed on January 22, 1969 with the New Philharmonia Orchestra (Hunt CD 726, 1990).

<sup>53</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle, Angel CDCB 54047, 1989, on CD.

<sup>54</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*; the Manhattan School of Music Symphony, conducted by Glen Cortese, Titanic Ti-257, 1998, on CD. An earlier essay by this author was included in the concert program book and also in the CD liner notes.

<sup>55</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*; National Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leonard Slatkin, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, DC, May 20-22, 1999. The program annotator for these concerts was Richard Freed, who also contributed the notes to both the LP and the eventual CD releases of Harold Farberman's 11/79 recording of the Sixth. The original LP release (MMG: 4D-MMG 107X) had the "A-S" order of inner movements, but for its 1999 CD re-release (VOX2 7212), this was changed to "S-A." According to the conductor, with whom I spoke on August 1<sup>st</sup>, this was done without his knowledge or consent. Farberman was stunned to learn of the switch, and emphatically endorsed his original "A-S" sequence. In his liner notes for the CD, Freed acknowledges the present author's research and conclusions, and suggests that the matter can be resolved to one's own personal taste by reprogramming the CD player.

<sup>56</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, the KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) Symphony Orchestra, conducted by James Judd, April 25 & 26, 2002.

<sup>57</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, the American Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Leon Botstein, the Bard Music Festival, Bard College, New York, August 16, 2002.

Beyond individual performances loom larger issues. One world-renowned conductor admitted to this researcher that he has avoided programming Mahler Six of late because of the intense controversy it provokes. This is downright alarming; must our musical perceptions be warped by errant musicology? Unless and until new evidence surfaces, *no* argument so far has refuted the simple fact that Mahler himself *never* performed, nor asked his colleagues to perform, his Sixth with its middle movements other than “A-S”; nor did he request either of his publishers to reorder the Sixth’s inner movements “Scherzo-Andante.”

If Mahler ever meant to revoke his decision to have the Sixth’s Andante precede its Scherzo, it must be regarded as one of the best-kept secrets in the annals of music history. The time is surely ripe to rectify a sadly misdirected, generation-old performance practice, and share with the musical public the experience of hearing Gustav Mahler’s Sixth Symphony as its composer intended.

*Jerry Bruck*  
*New York City*  
*October 19th, 2002*

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<sup>58</sup> Gustav Mahler, *Symphony No. 6*, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Mariss Jansons, October 4 & 6, 2002.

### CREDITS:

I am particularly indebted to Professor Emeritus Edward R. Reilly, of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, for setting me on the road to the discoveries in this paper by generously giving me his time as well as access to his library of books and papers. Above all, his scholarly advice and criticism guided my investigations and eventual conclusions, and made an invaluable contribution to the final result.

I also thank Dr. Glen Barton Cortese, former conductor of the Manhattan School of Music Symphony Orchestra, for including my first draft of these notes in the Program Book for his “A-S” performances of the Mahler Sixth in October of 1998 (the CD is available on Titanic Ti-257).

Additional sincere thanks go to the staff of the Internationale Gustav Mahler Gesellschaft in Vienna and its Editor-in-Chief of the Complete Critical Edition, Dr. Reinhold Kubik, who made available to me many of the original documents from their archive. Thanks also to Dr. Morten Solvik, who contributed his valuable comments and insights to our discussions at the IGMG. Added to their efforts are those of Dr. Eveline Nikkels, President of the Gustav Mahler Society of Holland, and the staff of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, who made it possible for me to examine and photograph materials from the Willem Mengelberg Archive.

This manuscript was prepared with the invaluable editorial advice and assistance of Louise Bloomfield and Katherine Rousseau. In draft form it was read critically by Glen Cortese, Jeffrey Gantz, Joel Lazar, Niall O’Loughlin, Edward Reilly, and Morten Solvik.

Finally, my thanks to that dedicated Mahlerian Gilbert E. Kaplan, who has patiently waited past innumerable deadlines for this “White Paper” to be finished and submitted to his Kaplan Foundation for publication.



LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS:

SOURCE

- Cover Assembling the puzzle: Mengelberg's conducting score as of 1920  
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- Plate I Cover of Mahler's conducting score, showing his altered timings of movements 2, 3, and 4 (Kahnt's first full score, used as the engraver's model (*Stichvorlage II*) for the second, revised edition)  
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- Plate II C.F. Kahnt advertisement for their Mahler 6th publications, with title page of Richard Specht's "Thematic Analysis" pocket guide  
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- Plate VII Concert program for the Dutch premiere, **conducted by Willem Mengelberg (runout to 's-Gravenhage, October 28, 1916).**  
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*Mengelberg Archive, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag  
Muziekbibliotheek & Muziekarchieven van het Gemeentemuseum Den Haag*

Plate X Two pages from Mengelberg's conducting score, showing his renumbering of inner movements, with a pencilled notation on the title page of the Andante (II): "In the small score the Scherzo begins here"

*Mengelberg Archive, Koninklijke Bibliotheek Den Haag  
Muziekbibliotheek & Muziekarchieven van het Gemeentemuseum Den Haag*

Plate XI Concert program of October 5, 1919 (following Alma's telegram) with the order of the Sixth's inner movements changed to "S-A"

*Concertgebouworkest, Amsterdam*

**A TIMELINE OF THE MAHLER SIXTH:**

	<i>Order of inner movements:</i>	<b>S-A</b>	<b>A-S</b>
1903 summer: Mahler completes short scores of inner movements and sketches first movement		?	?
1904 summer: Mahler completes draft of first movement, composes Finale, plays entire work for Alma on piano		?	?
1905 May 1: Mahler completes autograph score (S-A, later corrected by Mahler to A-S)		X	(X)
1906 March: C.F. Kahnt publishes folio and study scores		X	
1906 April 17: Mahler writes to Zemlinsky to request that they meet to play through the latter's 4-hand piano reduction			
1906 May 1: Mahler has Sixth read by Vienna Philharmonic		?	?
1906 May: Richard Specht's Thematic Analysis booklet published by C.F. Kahnt (S-A, later republished A-S)		X	(X)
1906 May: C.F. Kahnt publishes Zemlinsky's 4-hand piano reduction (S-A, later republished A-S)		X	(X)
<b>1906 May 27: Essen premiere, Mahler conducts (A-S)</b>			<b>X</b>
1906: C.F. Kahnt inserts erratum slips in unsold copies of both orchestral scores and piano reduction (A-S)			X
1906 October 8: Oskar Fried premieres Sixth in Berlin; Mahler attends (A-S)			X
1906: C.F. Kahnt publishes revised editions of folio and study scores, and piano reduction (all A-S)			X
<b>1906 November 8: Munich premiere, Mahler conducts (A-S)</b>			<b>X</b>
1906 November 14: Munich 2 <sup>nd</sup> performance conducted by Bernhard Stavenhagen in Mahler's absence (A-S)			X
<b>1907 January 4: Vienna premiere, Mahler conducts (A-S)</b>			<b>X</b>
1907 January 17: Mahler asks Mengelberg for his score to make a final revision			X
1907 January 30: Mahler returns updated score to Mengelberg (score remains A-S)			X

1907 March 11: Leipzig premiere, Hans Winderstein conducts (A-S)	X
1907 April 5: Dresden “premiere” – Ernst von Schuch conducts middle movements only (A-S)	X
1909 July 6: Letter from Mahler to Mengelberg requesting return of the latter’s conducting score for further changes	X
1910: Mahler signs contract with Universal Edition	
1911 May 18: Mahler dies in Vienna	
1912 May: Schoenberg lectures on the Mahler Sixth in Prague (“A-S” order is implied)	X
1916 September 14: Mengelberg conducts Amsterdam premiere (A-S)	X
1919 October 1: Telegram from Alma Mahler to Mengelberg: “First Scherzo, then Andante”	X
1919 October 5: Mengelberg conducts Mahler 6 again (now S-A)	X
1919 October 11: Oskar Fried conducts Sixth in Vienna (A-S)	X
1920 May 14: Mengelberg conducts Sixth again at Amsterdam Mahler Festival (S-A)	X
1920 October 7: Oskar Fried conducts Sixth in Vienna Mahler cycle (A-S)	X
1947 December 11: Mitropoulos conducts U.S. premiere in New York (A-S)	X
1963 Summer: IGMG publishes Critical Edition, edited by Erwin Ratz (S-A)	X
1998 October 16/18: Glen Cortese conducts MSM Orchestra in New York (A-S) with first draft of this paper in concert program	X
1998: IGMG publishes revised Critical Edition, edited by Karl Heinz Füssl and Reinhold Kubik (S-A)	X
1999 May 20-22: Leonard Slatkin conducts National Symphony Orchestra at the John F. Kennedy Center, Washington, DC (A-S)	X
1999: CD (Ti-257) of edited Cortese/MSM performances, recorded	

by Jerry Bruck, issued by Titanic Records (A-S)

X

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