

Gustav Mahler and Hans Rott
The Musicological Assessment of a Relationship

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Summary

In 1979, the musicologist Paul Banks rediscovered the Viennese composer Hans Rott (1858-1884), whose symphony (written between 1878 and 1880) seemingly contain some themes and compositional techniques known from Mahler's works. After this discovery, musicologists have turned their attention to Rott's life and music. This thesis discusses the key musicological publications after 1980 on the subject of Rott's life and music, specifically in relation to Mahler. Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework and introduces the concept of the 'great composer' as described by Jim Samson. Further, it discusses how musicologists in general have addressed Rott and his relationship with Mahler, and addresses shortly the musical fragments that Mahler borrowed from Rott's symphony. Chapter 2 turns to a case study. Two publications by the musicologists Helmuth Kreysing and Frank Litterscheid on the influence of Rott's symphony on Mahler's music are being discussed.

Introduction

“Was die Musik an ihm verloren hat, ist gar nicht zu ermessen: zu solchem Fluge erhebt sich sein genius schon in dieser Ersten Symphonie, die er als zwanzigjähriger Jüngling schrieb und die ihn – es ist nicht zu viel gesagt – zum Begründer der neuen Symphonie macht, wie ich sie verstehe.”¹

These words by Gustav Mahler represent the gist of how musicology has always interpreted Hans Rott's symphony in relation to the composer's fate. Unlike Mahler's music which has been studied thoroughly by musicologists since the early twentieth century, Rott's music has been rediscovered by musicologists only in 1979. Since then, several publications were dedicated to his life and works, however, these invariably address him in relation to his much well-known contemporary, Mahler. The reason why Rott is virtually always mentioned in relation to Mahler, is because of their friendship, and the many reminiscences of Rott's symphony in Mahler's music. As can be deduced from the citation above, even Mahler saw Rott as an example for the symphonies he himself was to create, that is, not a literal example, but a formal model in general. For this reason, Rott is considered by musicologists a forerunner of Mahler, someone who possessed comparable skills and talent, but who, tragically, died very young. Therefore, Mahler came out as the great composer who shaped the symphony in its last and greatest form at the end of the nineteenth century, and the beginning of the twentieth century. However, they studied at the same time at the Viennese conservatory. Rott was born in 1858 and died in 1884. Mahler was born in 1860 and died in 1911. Mahler started his study at the conservatory two years after Rott, in 1876.

However, as Rott was investigated further, and scholars identified more reminiscences of Mahler's music in his music, the scholarly attitude towards both composers also changed. Rott was considered more and more as the tragic young talent who died too young to develop and show his talent, and Mahler appeared more and more in a suspicious light when viewed by comparison with Rott. Some musicologists considered that he plagiarized Rott's symphony, and that he was aware of that. In 1900, Mahler possessed a score of Rott's symphony, and it is documented that he considered to perform the work with the Wiener Philharmoniker when he was the director of that orchestra (from 1897 till 1907). Some musicologists reckon that he avoided to do so, in order to prevent that the themes from Rott's symphony that Mahler used in his 2nd and 3rd symphonies were recognized.

¹ “What music has lost in this man, is beyond measure: his genius reaches for such heights already in his first symphony, which he composed at the age of 20 years, and this makes him – not too much said – the founder of the new symphony as I see it.” Gustav Mahler in the recollections of Nathalie Bauer-Lechner: N. Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler*. Republished by J. Kilian, 1923 rev. and ext. edition, Hamburg: Wagner, 1984, p. 117. All translations are mine.

Although the influence of Rott's symphony on Mahler's symphonies should be acknowledged, this thesis argues that musicology focusses too much on these two aspects when discussing the relationship between the two composers, and their output. It seems that, the more is being discovered and analysed about the relationship between Rott's and Mahler's music, the more the musicologists feel obliged to either stress these stigmas or to neglect Rott's influence on Mahler altogether. Therefore, I propose a reassessment of the process of research on Rott's life and music.

Leopold Novak already listed and categorized the works of Rott in 1975², but the history of the actual musicological research on the life and works of this composer starts with two publications by the American musicologist Paul Banks: the article "An early Symphonic Prelude?"³, in which he discusses the authorship of a symphonic prelude written by Mahler or Rott during their conservatory years, and the PhD dissertation on the early social life of Mahler: "The Early Social and Musical Environment of Gustav Mahler"⁴. In the article, Banks shows he is not very impressed by the aesthetic and compositional qualities of Rott's works that he had hitherto examined. For example, he reckons the counterpoint in Rott's early works⁵ "of inconsistent quality".⁶ And further he says that: "it must also be said that Rott's inventive powers did not always rise to the demands he made of them."⁷ The dissertation discusses the early social life of Mahler, and contains a chapter about Hans Rott. In this dissertation, Banks is the first to notice the influence of Rott's music on Mahler's, and provides examples to support his claim. He is also the first to give an account (although succinct) of Rott's life (the only earlier biography written by Maja Loehr in 1949 was published only in 2000 in an edition by Uwe Harten⁸). Here, he is more appreciative of Rott's symphony: "Though not entirely successful as a whole, it contains much very impressive music."⁹

As more musicologists came to research Rott and his music, more opinions on the influence of Rott's music on Mahler's came about, which are not always accurate, regarding the historical and musical pieces of evidence that have survived.

In this thesis, I shall address the portrayal of the relationship between Mahler and Rott by musicologists, from 1979 onwards when Rott was rediscovered by musicologists, and specifically,

²Leopold Novak, Die Kompositionen und Skizzen von Hans Rott in der Musiksammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek. In: *Beiträge zur Musikdokumentation. Franz Grasberger zum 60. Geburtstag*, Tutzing: 1975, 273-340.

³ Paul Banks, "An Early Symphonic Prelude by Mahler?", in *19th-Century Music*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1979): 141-149.

⁴ Paul Banks, *The Early Social and Musical Environment of Gustav Mahler*. PhD Dissertation, 1982.

⁵ I.e., the works written before the Symphony in E major.

⁶ Banks, "An Early Symphonic Prelude by Mahler?", 145.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Uwe Harten, *Hans Rott (1858-1884): Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen Und Dokumente Aus Dem Nachlass von Maja Loehr (1888-1964) Herausgegeben Und Kommentiert von Uwe Harten*, Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000.

⁹ Banks, *The Early Social and Musical Environment of Gustav Mahler. PhD Dissertation*, 250.

how Rott has been discussed in comparison by Mahler: Rott as the talent who tragically died too young to show his potential, and Mahler as having plagiarized Rott. I shall propose an alternative point of view which does not view Mahler and Rott in opposition from one another, or puts one above the other in terms of aesthetic quality. Thereby I shall discuss some of the biases associated with both composers in recent musicology, especially the ones that are not based upon actual facts. In this thesis, I will restrict my research to the articles and books written by the most important contributors to the subject of Hans Rott, namely Paul Banks, Uwe Harten, Helmuth Kreysing, Frank Litterscheid and Johannes Volker Schmidt.

Chapter 1 starts with explaining the theoretical framework I use. First, I deal with the problematic concept of “the great composer” in the nineteenth century, as defined by Jim Samson (2000).¹⁰ Then I will describe the history of research on Rott, and assess the discourse on the relationship between Mahler and Rott. Chapter 2 looks closer at two publications of the musicologists Helmuth Kreysing and Frank Litterscheid on the similarities between Rott’s- and Mahler’s music. Considering all the evidence, I conclude that the research on Rott has been done too much in retrospect of the life and music of Mahler, and that musicological research should distance themselves more from the concept of “the great composer” in the nineteenth century when discussing Rott’s life and music. Rott should be viewed as an autonomous part of music history.

¹⁰ Jim Samson, “The Great Composer” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Music*, 259-286. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Chapter 1

The musicological discourse on Rott's life and music has almost invariably considered Rott in comparison with Mahler, thereby presenting Rott as young talent who tragically died too young, and regarding Mahler as the great composer.

Rott was born in 1858 in Vienna, and began studying at the Viennese conservatory in 1875, two years before Mahler started his study there. Rott studied organ with Anton Bruckner¹¹, and Mahler studied piano with Julius Epstein.¹² They both took classes of composition with Franz Krenn.¹³ During his last year at the conservatory (1878), Rott worked on the first movement of his symphony in E major (the only symphony he composed), which he finished just before the annual assessment of compositions by the jury of the conservatory. The symphony movement was rejected by this jury, and Rott was the only student who did not earn a prize for his submission. He finished the symphony in 1880, and during that year, he entered this work for the Beethoven Competition, together with a string sextet, in order to get an annual dispensation, which would have given him the opportunity to compose full time. To reach this goal, he even made an appointment with Johannes Brahms, who was member of the jury that assessed the submissions, in order to persuade him to assess his works favourably. Rott also tried to persuade Hans Richter (who was then the principal director of the Wiener Philharmoniker) to perform the symphony with that orchestra. He played the symphony at the piano in front of Richter. Richter was impressed, but was not willing to perform the piece. As Rott was unemployed at that time, and in financial need, he was forced to accept the vacancy of organist at the Mulhouse choir society Concordia he had applied for. Rott had only applied for that job as ultimate choice for earning some money, for he was very unwilling to leave Vienna. During his travel to Mulhouse, he became insane. When another passenger of the train tried to lit a cigar, Rott drew his revolver in order to prevent him to do so, fully convinced that Brahms had filled the wagon with dynamite. At the next stop, Rott was brought to a hospital, and later to a mental institute. He never recovered, and died there of tuberculosis in 1884, at the age of 26.¹⁴

In this chapter, I deal with the way in which musicology has assessed Rott's life and music following the concept of the 'great composer'. Discussing the contradiction in the discourse about Mahler and

¹¹ Uwe Harten, ed., *Hans Rott (1858-1884): Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Dokumente aus dem Nachlass von Maja Loehr (1888-1964) Herausgegeben und Kommentiert von Uwe Harten*. Wien: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2000, 61.

¹² Eveline Nikkels, *Gustav Mahler, Een Leven in Tien Symfonieën*, Hilversum: Just Publishers, 2009, 21.

¹³ Harten, *Hans Rott (1858-1884): Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen Und Dokumente Aus Dem Nachlass von Maja Loehr (1888-1964) Herausgegeben Und Kommentiert von Uwe Harten*, 66.

¹⁴ All biographical information provided by: Uwe Harten, *Hans Rott (1858-1884) Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Dokumente aus dem Nachlaß von Maja Loehr (1888-1964). Herausgegeben Und Kommentiert von Uwe Harten*.

Rott, (i.e. Mahler as the great composer and Rott as the unrecognized talent who tragically died young), requires first to clarify the term ‘the great composer’. I understand the concept of greatness as described by Jim Samson¹⁵, and consider this as my theoretical framework. His main argument is that the canon of the great composers was “a product of the nineteenth century”¹⁶. Therefore, we can assume that Mahler, who wrote most of his works around the end of the nineteenth century, was being judged by his contemporaries if he could fit in this canon. The same could be said of Rott, and the way in which the reception of his symphony was strongly determined by the opinions of Brahms, Hanslick and Richter¹⁷, is exemplary for the influence of this canon-viewed judgement of the time. As Samson says, each new work needed to be historically validated.¹⁸ For that matter, it is interesting to see how Rott tried to validate his symphony: the symphony recalls Wagner’s and Brahms’s music (and through Brahms, implicitly it reminds of Beethoven’s 9th symphony and its structure) especially in the finale of his symphony. No doubt that Rott hoped to persuade Brahms to approve his symphony by paying a compositional tribute to Brahms’s 1st symphony.

This definition of the great composer in the nineteenth century is important because this is the main point of view from which Mahler is seen by musicologists. The reason why the similarities between Mahler’s and Rott’s music have evoked so much astonishment, is because of the established reputation of Mahler as a ‘great composer’. However, the discourse mainly used in the literature about Rott compares him with Mahler, and labels him as unappreciated talent. He is presented as the unrecognized talent who died young without having had the chance of developing himself and show his potentials. I use the concept of ‘the unappreciated genius’ in the same way as presented by Hans Lenneberg in his essay *The Myth of the Unappreciated (musical) Genius*¹⁹. He states that, “in the Romantic tradition, great composers are usually depicted as not only destined to be gifted, but also innovative or radical and of extraordinary integrity. Generally, they are moody, sometimes to point of insanity, and almost inevitably unappreciated or misunderstood”²⁰. He also states that there seems to be a need to consider the greatest creators as martyrs, and asks why tragic compositions have to be viewed as “products of misère”²¹. Of course, this kind of language fits perfectly with the image of Rott as tragically having died young from disease and insanity without having had the chance to develop himself. Lenneberg is right when he states that the “[composers to whom recognition came posthumously] were usually exceptions whose ‘failure’ can be explained on grounds other than a

¹⁵ Samson, “*The Great Composer*”, 259-286.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁷ i.e. when he submitted the work for the Beethoven price, and when he played it for Richter in 1880, for the symphony was not performed before 1989, after it was rediscovered by musicologists. As only few people knew about Rott’s symphony during his life, it cannot be considered a public reception.

¹⁸ Samson, “*The Great Composer*”, 265.

¹⁹ Hans Lenneberg, “The Myth of the Unappreciated Genius” in *The Musical Quarterly* vol. 66 no. 2 (1980): 219-233.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 221.

²¹ *Ibid.* 226, 227.

martyrdom to which a Philistine public condemned them. Even when they denounced a now-accepted masterpiece, their arguments [i.e. arguments of contemporary critics] were generally right”.²² As to the importance of the musicological discourse on the relation between Rott and Mahler, I consider the importance of the research on borrowings and musical influences in music history from the perspective defined by Bruno Nettl.²³

The history of the musicological research on Hans Rott begins in 1980, with a PhD dissertation by Paul Banks on Mahler’s musical environment in his conservatory years.²⁴ In the fourth chapter he discusses Mahler’s fellow students. Banks has an interesting explanation on why a description of Rott’s musical style is important for understanding Mahler’s music: “Such a description opens up a previously unknown aspect of Mahler’s creative personality: the way Mahler enshrined Rott’s memory in the music of his own symphonies”, and further: “this was Mahler’s tribute to a friend of his youth who, he felt, was prevented by tragically short life from fulfilling the extraordinary promise displayed in his completed compositions”²⁵. Mahler is not yet depicted as the great genius who appears to have stolen some musical fragments, as will soon happen in publications by other musicologists (which I will discuss later), but Rott appears to have been viewed from the very beginning, by Banks, as the promising, young, talented composer, who tragically died too young. This portrayal is endorsed at the end of the chapter, where Banks says that: “...his tragedy was that he was allowed no time to make his work known...”, and: “this is perhaps Rott’s ultimate tragedy”²⁶. All these citations are clear examples of the way in which Banks addresses Rott as a ‘tragic case’ in the music history. It is also remarkable that in this chapter, Banks regards many aspects of Rott’s music from a retrospective point of view: apart from mentioning the influences of Brahms, Schubert and others on Rott, he considers some features of Rott’s music as “Mahlerian”. For example, he mentions “a Mahlerian parody” (p. 257), “a Mahlerian progression” (p. 258), and “a Mahlerian outline” (p. 263). So the first publication in which Rott is addressed as a composer who inspired Mahler presents Rott as a Mahlerian composer rather than a composer assessed for his own compositional style. As Mahler wrote almost all of his surviving works after Rott wrote his symphony (which is his last work)²⁷, this cannot be just.

²² Ibid. 221, 225.

²³ Bruno Nettl, “The Institutionalization of Musicology” in *Rethinking Music*, 287-310. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

²⁴ Banks, “*The Early Social and Musical Environment of Gustav Mahler*” PhD Dissertation, 1982.

²⁵ Ibid. 234.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Except for some works Rott wrote during his stay in the mental hospital, but he destroyed all of these works immediately after writing them. See: Uwe Harten, *Hans Rott (1858-1884) Biographie, Briefe, Aufzeichnungen und Dokumente aus dem Nachlaß von Maja Loehr*.

In 1984 at the 100th commemoration of Rott's death, Banks devoted an article entirely to Hans Rott: Hans Rott (1858-1884)²⁸. It is the first scholarly publication in which Rott's full name is mentioned in the title. Interestingly, Banks does not make any remarks about Rott's life as being tragic. Neither does he consider Mahler as the genius who stole some musical fragments from Rott. However, it is in this article that he first discusses the possible reasons why Mahler did not perform Rott's symphony, after he claimed that he planned to do so in 1900²⁹. Banks's interpretation is that Mahler probably felt guilty because his own conservatory-period works were very successful and accepted, while Rott's works from the same period were repeatedly rejected: "So the quotations and the abortive plan for a performance in some sense may have been an attempt to atone for an injustice to which Mahler felt he had contributed".³⁰

In his dissertation (1980) and his article of 1984, Banks postulates the two biggest issues in the history of the research on the relationship between Mahler and Rott. First, Mahler copied some significant features from Rott's symphony, and used them in his own works. The most prominent examples are the main theme of the scherzo of Rott's symphony, which was used by Mahler in the scherzo of his 2nd symphony³¹:



Figure 1a: The similar themes from the scherzo of Rott's symphony, and the scherzo of Mahler's 2nd symphony (Banks, Hans Rott (1858-1884) p. 495)

Another example is the use of the remarkable modulation from C major to A-flat major (and back) near the end of the first movement of Rott's symphony, which Mahler used in the finale of his 7th symphony³²:

²⁸ Paul Banks, "Hans Rott, 1858-1884" in *The Musical Times* vol. 125, no. 1699 (1980): 493-495.

²⁹ N. Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler*. Republished by J. Kilian, 1923 rev. and ext. edition, Hamburg, 1984, p117.

³⁰ Banks, "Hans Rott, 1858-1884", 494.

³¹ Example from Banks, "Hans Rott, 1858-1884".

³² *Ibid.*

g) Rott: Symphony in E major, first movement

h) Mahler: Seventh Symphony, fifth movement, b5of

Figure 1b: Comparison of bar 156-157 (Rott) and bar 51-52 (Mahler) (Banks, Hans Rott (1858-1884) p. 495

Second: why did Mahler not make efforts to get Rott's symphony performed when he was the director of the Wiener Philharmoniker? The latter issue is important because this question endorses the change in portrayal of Mahler by musicologists, from having been inspired by Rott to having plagiarized Rott³³.

In 1996 came out the first publication on Hans Rott by someone else than Paul Banks in a German publication, the series Musik-Konzepte vol. 91³⁴. This publication contains an article by Helmuth Kreysing and Frank Litterscheid in which they discuss the similarities between Rott's symphony and Mahler's music. I shall return to the publications by Kreysing and Litterscheid on Rott in chapter 2.

The first book that gives a complete account of the life and works of Hans Rott is by Johannes Volker Schmidt (2010)³⁵. The first part of the preface provides a short account of Rott's efforts to get his symphony performed (in 1880), and not succeeding. Then he mentions that Mahler did not perform Rott's symphony. These aspects are the first in Volker Schmidt's account, even before looking at any other works written by Rott, as if these aspects are the most important in the history of Rott's life that the readers must know. Although the book provides a lot of very useful and comprehensive

³³ As is the main point of view of the musicologists Kreysing and Litterscheid who have discussed the similarities between Rott's symphony and Mahler's music.

³⁴ Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, "Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!" in *Musik-Konzepte 91 Mahler der unbekannte Bekannte*, edited by Heinz-Klaus Metzger & Rainer Riehn, 46-64. München: Bosch-Druck, Landshut, 1996.

³⁵ , Johannes Volker Schmidt, *Hans Rott Leben und Werk*. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 2010.

information on Rott's life, Rott's premature death, and the role of Mahler in the performance history of Rott's symphony still seem to dominate the musicological discussion of Rott's output.

This is the most recent publication on Rott's life (2010)³⁶, so even nowadays it seems that musicologists discussing Rott, still have not gotten over the fact that Mahler took inspiration from Rott's symphony, and deliberately avoided to perform it. This is a great obstruction for musicologists who strive to view Rott as an autonomous part of music history. Such viewings that constantly rely on how Mahler was paired to Rott, influence significantly how Rott's music is discussed independently from Mahler's, and prevents Rott from being considered as a composer in his own right.

³⁶ There is only one more recent publication on Rott: Uwe Harten & Johannes Volker Schmidt, *Studien zu Leben und Werk des Wiener Komponisten Hans Rott* (2014). This publication contains articles and contributions to a congress about Rott, all of which have an earlier date of publication. None of them is relevant for this essay.

Chapter 2

This chapter addresses some studies on Rott's music, and similarities between his and Mahler's music. The publications I discuss here as case studies, are two volumes of the German series *Musik-Konzepte*: the first is dedicated to Mahler (no. 91, 1996), and the second is dedicated to Rott (no. 103-104, 1996)³⁷.

The first text that discusses the similarities between Mahler's- and Rott's music fully and explicitly is the essay 'Mehr als Mahler's Nullte!', by Helmuth Kreysing and Frank Litterscheid (1996)³⁸. Their first statement is remarkable: "the rising reception of the works of the Viennese composer Hans Rott, in particular his first symphony, questions the scope of originality of the Mahlerian symphonies."³⁹ Such a statement, especially as the opening phrase of an article, is an immediate attack on Mahler's music, as it implies that Mahler's symphonies are not as original as generally thought. After giving some information about Rott's life, Kreysing and Litterscheid turn again to Mahler. They call into question the true reasons why Mahler did not perform Rott's symphony. They state that it is very likely that Mahler was reluctant to perform a work with so many resonances of his own works: "a performance of Rott's symphony would have made clear the forerunnership to his own works"⁴⁰ They also doubt if Mahler even tried to get the symphony performed by other conductors: "especially since Mahler [and others] could have the possibility to let another conductor perform the symphony. However, it is not known that Mahler took efforts to do so."⁴¹ Furthermore, they even state that Mahler would not have dared to use a theme that a broad audience was familiar with: "Since Mahler was well aware of the blames of plagiarism, he would not use a theme, on such an outstanding point, which was broadly known."⁴² By making this last observation, Kreysing and Litterscheid apparently forgot to take in account the prominent opening of Mahler's 3rd symphony, which is clearly reminds of

³⁷ Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, "Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!" in *Musik-Konzepte 91 Mahler der unbekannte Bekannte*, ed. Heinz-Klaus Metzger & Rainer Riehn, 46-64. München: Bosch-Druck, Landshut, 1996., Helmuth Kreysing, Preface to *Musik-Konzepte 103/104 Hans Rott der Begründer der neuen Symphonie* (München: Bosch-Druck, Landshut, 1996).

³⁸ Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, "*Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!*".

³⁹ "Die beginnende Rezeption der Werke des Wiener Komponisten Hans Rott, insbesondere seiner 1. Sinfonie, stellt den Umfang der Originalität der Mahlerschen Sinfonien in Frage: ohne die Musik Hans Rotts hätte es die Sinfonien Gustav Mahlers in der vorliegende Wiese nicht gegeben". Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, "*Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!*" 46.

⁴⁰ "Wäre doch durch eine Aufführung die Vorläuferschaft der Rottschen Sinfonie zu seinen Werken deutlich geworden". – *ibid.* 48.

⁴¹ "...zumal für Mahler u.U. auch die Möglichkeit bestanden hätte, Rotts Sinfonie durch einen anderen Dirigenten aufführen zu lassen. Es ist aber nicht belegt, daß Mahler dieses jemals versucht hätte". *ibid.*

⁴² Da sich Mahler den Vorwürfen des Plagiats wohl bewußt war, würde er an derart auffallenden Stellen gewiß kein Thema verwenden, das einer breiten Öffentlichkeit bekannt war." *ibid.* 52.

the main theme of the finale of Brahms's 1st symphony, which is also the very same theme that Rott used in the finale of his own symphony (see figure 2a and 2b).



Figure 2a: Brahms, main theme of the finale of the 1st symphony

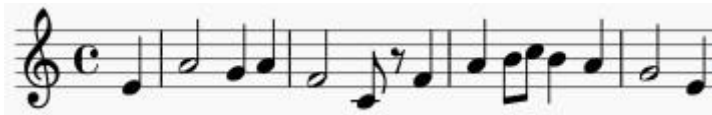


Figure 2b: Mahler, opening of the 3rd symphony

Of course Mahler's theme is not an exact copy of Brahms's, but since the themes are very similar, scholars might as well consider it a case of plagiarism. Considering this example, it is not just to state that Mahler would not have dared to use a familiar theme. It is important to note that in both cases Mahler used the themes in a very different way than Rott and Brahms did in their own works. It would be an enormous error to doubt the originality of Mahler's music just because of such similarities, since the developments of the themes are as important as, or even more important than the borrowings. I also doubt if the audience would really be disturbed by the similarities with the works of Rott and Brahms. Mahler was, from his 2nd symphony on, always very much loved by concert audiences, and very much disliked by the newspapers and critics.⁴³ In the 2nd symphony, there is so much more than only this one theme he borrowed from Rott, and Mahler's development of that theme is so much different from Rott's, that it is not likely that Mahler would be accused of plagiarism. Especially in 1900, when Mahler was an established conductor, who received more and more credits for his own music, it would have been safe to reveal a symphony of an unknown contemporary composer who was an inspiration for Mahler. Of course, people would have recognized the borrowed features, but as Mahler's own music was more and more accepted as innovative, Rott's symphony would not have changed this image.

⁴³ As the critics in Mahler's time were very conservative, they often disapproved of new music. They especially disliked Mahler because of the complexity of his music, and because his Jewish ancestry. I will not elaborate on this, for it goes beyond the scope of my thesis. See: Morton Solvik. Mahler and Germany in *The Mahler Companion* ed. Donald Mitchell & Andrew Nicholson, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999 p126-137.

They question his claims to have planned a performance of Rott's symphony. The question whether or not Mahler was able to realize this plan is an issue musicologists have not been able to find sufficient evidence to answer it yet. However, this issue turns up almost every time that the relationship between Mahler and Rott or the relationship between their music is discussed. The question whether or not Mahler tried to perform Rott's symphony does not add anything to the assessment of Rott's music, so musicologists should not mention it when analysing Rott's music and the similarities with Mahler's music.

In the second part of this article, Kreysing and Litterscheid discuss the similarities between Rott's symphony, and Mahler's music, specifically Mahler's 2nd, 3rd, 5th and 7th symphonies. Thereby, they approach the music from a Mahlerian point of view, which is the main goal of the article, as it appeared in a volume dedicated to Mahler. For instance, they bring as evidence some flute-trills at bar 208 in the trio of the scherzo of Rott's symphony which they compare with a passage in the finale of Mahler's 2nd symphony (at bar 28). They remark that this feature is often recognised as birdsongs by the musicologists who have discussed Mahler's music in great detail.⁴⁴ Since there is no evidence of Rott wanting to recall birdsongs with such flute-trills, comparing them with Mahler's similar passages as being birdsongs (be it in the finale of the 2nd symphony or elsewhere) is rather pointless.

Another issue in this essay, is whether or not Mahler copied the 'Ewigkeits-motiv' (i.e. the main theme of the finale of his 2nd symphony) from the trio of Rott's scherzo, or from Wagner's opera Siegfried (i.e. the theme on the text "ewig war ich, ewig bin ich")⁴⁵. Figures 3a, 3b and 3c show the motive used by Mahler, Rott and Wagner respectively.



Figure 3a: Mahler, the main theme of the finale of his 2nd symphony



Figure 3b: Rott, the similar motive in the trio of the scherzo of his symphony

⁴⁴ Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, "*Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!*". 56, Kreysing and Litterscheid do not give examples of studies or articles on Mahler's use of bird calls.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 57.



Figure 3c: Wagner, the 'Ewigkeits-motiv' from the opera Siegfried

They conclude that “irrespective whether Mahler has derived this theme from Rott or from Wagner, or from Wagner through Rott, the whole trio, even the whole scherzo, actually the whole symphony has had a major influence on Mahler”⁴⁶, but this conclusion does definitely not fit with their former statement, in which they cannot decide whether it was Wagner or Rott who influenced this one single theme of Mahler’s 2nd symphony. This issue adds nothing to the musicological assessment of Mahler, Rott or their relationship. Further, Kreysing and Litterscheid claim in a footnote that “Evidence of forerunnership of Rott’s symphony on Mahler must have its impact on a Rott-interpretation”⁴⁷. This implies again that Rott’s music cannot be seen independent from Mahler’s, and that seeing Mahler’s music as having been influenced by Rott’s also means seeing Rott’s music as supervened by Mahler. That implies that Mahler and Rott cannot be seen as independent parts of music history anymore. Again: such assumptions are very problematic for musicologists attempting to regard Rott as a composer in his own right.

The next case of suggestive discourse is at the end of the article, when they discuss the phenomenon of Finale-Symphony⁴⁸: Kreysing and Litterscheid state that, Mahler must have copied the technique from Rott because Brahms and Bruckner did not recapitulate themes from earlier movements in the finale of their symphonies, so Mahler could not have copied this technique from them.⁴⁹ This statement is faulty in several ways. Firstly, the argument that Bruckner did not write any finale-symphonies is wrong. His 8th symphony is in fact a finale-symphony, and since it was published in 1894, before Mahler’s 2nd, 3rd, 5th and his other finale-symphonies were finished, Mahler could easily have copied this technique from Bruckner. Secondly, Kreysing and Litterscheid do not state for which symphony by Mahler their claim counts. There is no evidence that Mahler took any ideas from Rott to use in his 1st symphony. In the 2nd symphony, which is indeed a finale symphony, the structure is much more defined by its programme, i.e. the solving of the problem of life and death, stated in the first movement and worked out throughout the rest of the symphony. Thus, the programme is tightly linked to the recapitulations

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. 60.

⁴⁸ A finale-symphony is a symphony which recapitulates themes from the previous movements in the finale.

⁴⁹ Helmuth Kreysing & Frank Litterscheid, “*Mehr als Mahlers Nullte!*”. 62.

of the themes in the finale. In the 3rd symphony this technique is not used in the same way as in Rott's symphony. The finale of Mahler's 3rd symphony recapitulates small motives and instrumental features rather than entire themes, whereas Rott does recapitulate entire themes. And finally: Kreysing and Litterscheid mention only Bruckner and Brahms as being potential examples for Mahler, but these two composers were definitely not Mahler's only possible sources of inspiration. Beethoven, for example, was such a cult-figure in the musical world of that time, that it is very unlikely that Mahler did not get any influence from Beethoven's legacy during his student time. It is impossible to think that Mahler did not know about Beethoven's use of the technique of finale-symphony in the 5th and 9th symphonies, which were the most famous examples.

In the *Musik-Konzepte* 103-104⁵⁰, which is a volume dedicated entirely to the life and music of Hans Rott⁵¹, Kreysing considers the music of Rott as being the forerunner of Mahler, and states that "Hans Rott should be rescued from Mahler's shades, and it is a matter of time that his compositions will not anymore be regarded in retrospect from Mahler's works"⁵². In the same volume, Frank Litterscheid gives a thorough examination of Rott's symphony. He discusses the cyclic form of the symphony, the development of the themes, the harmonic particulars, the orchestration, and the coherence of the piece. He also addresses the language used in the performing instructions, and the influence of Rott's organ-playing skills. However, this article does not include any comments on the similarities with Mahler's music, and Rott's symphony is addressed in a formal analytic manner. This is in fact the first scholarly publication that shows that regards Rott's music completely independent from Mahler's music.

⁵⁰ Heinz-Klaus Metzger & Rainer Riehn, *Musik-Konzepte 103-104 Hans Rott Der Begründer der neuen Sinfonie*, München: Bosch-Druck, Landshut, 1996.

⁵¹ This volume appeared in the same year as the volume of *Musik-Konzepte* on Mahler.

⁵² "Hans Rott muß allerdings aus den Schatten Mahler's hervorgeholt werden, und es ist an der Zeit, seine Kompositionen nicht mehr im Rückblick vom Werk Mahler's aus zu betrachten". Helmuth Kreysing, *Preface to Musik-Konzepte 103/104 Hans Rott der Begründer der neuen Symphonie*, 8.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have discussed the way in which musicologists have analysed and discussed the life of Hans Rott, and his influence on Mahler. I have found that Rott is almost invariably regarded as a composer with a tragic destiny, because he died too young to display his talents. By contrast, Mahler has long been regarded as an established great composer of the end of the nineteenth century. That image has been changed when the originality of his symphonies was questioned. While Rott was raised on a pedestal, as being at least as talented as Mahler was, there was also a slight indignation towards Mahler in terms of assumed plagiarism.

The discourse on the similarities between Rott and Mahler, and on the influence Rott might have had on Mahler has become too much of a witch-hunt, at which the most important goal is to detect as many similarities as possible, in order to devalue the high status of Mahler as one of the great composers in music history in favour of Rott. Although it might seem fair to give Rott credits for his role in the history of music, musicologists should focus more on Rott's music as being independent from the influence it had on Mahler's music.

One of the biggest issues musicologists seemed to have with the history of the relationship between Mahler and Rott, is the question whether or not Mahler did make efforts to get Rott's symphony performed in 1900. As I have said in chapter 2, there are musicologists who think that Mahler did not get the chance to do so, and there are other musicologists who think that Mahler avoided to do so on purpose. As neither parties have convincing arguments or evidence to support their opinions, I suggest looking into another direction when searching for the answer. The letters from Mahler to his friends and family have all been investigated as primary sources for this question, but I think there might be other primary sources to investigate this issue. For instance, we know that Mahler expressed his plans to perform Rott's symphony in the summer of 1901, and we know that short after the start of the new season, Mahler got severely ill, and, as a result, resigned from conducting the Wiener Philharmoniker when he recovered. It might be useful to research how much influence Mahler retained on the programming of the Wiener Philharmoniker after he resigned and if the performance of Rott's symphony remained in the plans or not. Maybe Mahler contacted the new director about this matter? Or maybe he tried to schedule a performance of Rott's symphony when he worked in New York between 1907 and 1910? All these possibilities have not been investigated yet.

At last I think the concept of the great composer should be reconsidered, and the maintenance of this label on the famous composers in the history of music should be assessed more critically. The reputation of composers who are established as ‘great composers’ can only be devaluated when musicology keeps them on a pedestal. Greatness, says Samson, “implies an achievement or an aptitude so far beyond the ordinary that it is capable of remaking the conventions – resetting the terms on which future evaluations might be made”⁵³. This explanation of the word greatness counts fully for Rott. It could be said that he remade the conventions, as Mahler adapted Rott’s conventions in his own music. Rott’s symphony could count as the achievement with which he remade these conventions, as is supported by Mahler: “his genius reaches for such heights already in his first symphony, which he composed at the age of 20 years, and this makes him – not too much said – the founder of the new symphony as I see it”.

However, newly discovered composers, like Rott, should not be measured according to this concept, for they cannot build up the same reputation as the established great composers anymore. Indeed, composers like Rott have a different reception history in their own time than composers like Mahler. As more composers like Rott are being discovered, the concept loses its validity, for it provides an estimation of established composers that cannot be reached by newly discovered composers. They might be worth the same esteem, if they had not been forgotten, and if their music had been appreciated by their contemporaries.

⁵³ Samson, “*The Great Composer*”, 259.

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