

The Curse of the Ninth Symphony: Myth or Reality?



Classical music is rich in myths and superstitions, and one of the most famous is the "**Curse of the Ninth Symphony** ." According to this belief, every composer who dares to write their ninth symphony is doomed to die. While this may sound absurd, there are several notable examples that fuel this superstition.

The origin of this curse can be traced back to Ludwig van Beethoven, who passed away in 1827 after composing his Ninth Symphony, also known as the "Choral Symphony." Beethoven remains the most famous embodiment of this belief, but he is far from the only composer to be touched by this strange coincidence.

Among the composers most often cited as victims of this curse are Franz Schubert, Antonín Dvořák, Anton Bruckner, and Gustav Mahler. Franz Schubert, the author of an extensive musical repertoire, was unable to complete his Tenth Symphony and died prematurely. Antonín Dvořák lost his Symphony No. 1, also known as "The Bells of Zlonice," and

had to start his symphonic cycle anew. Anton Bruckner, whose Ninth Symphony remained unfinished, also fell victim to this curious coincidence.

However, the most famous and poignant example of the "Curse of the Ninth Symphony" is Gustav Mahler. After composing his monumental Eighth Symphony, Mahler feared tackling the Ninth. To outsmart fate, he wrote "Das Lied von der Erde" ("The Song of the Earth"), subtitled as a "symphony for contralto, tenor, and large orchestra." Mahler considered this a way to circumvent the curse. Yet, he eventually composed his Ninth Symphony in D major, which he regarded as his Tenth, claiming to have escaped destiny. Tragically, this symphony was the last he completed, as he died during the composition of his Tenth Symphony in F-sharp major.

Heitor Villa-Lobos and Dmitri Shostakovich are two composers who broke this so-called curse by composing their Tenth Symphonies. In 1952, Villa-Lobos was the first to do so, followed closely by Shostakovich in 1953. These examples challenged the validity of the superstition and demonstrated that musical creativity cannot be bound by irrational beliefs.

In an essay on Mahler, Arnold Schoenberg expressed the idea that the Ninth Symphony might be a limit for composers, as if the Tenth contained something that humanity was not yet ready to know. This notion adds a philosophical dimension to the superstition, suggesting that artistic creativity can sometimes be confronted with mysterious forces.

The "Curse of the Ninth Symphony" has also inspired artistic works, such as Abel Gance's 1918 film titled "The Tenth Symphony," which draws heavily from this myth.

Sources

- fr.wikipedia.org

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