

# *Harmony*<sup>TM</sup>

FORUM OF THE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA INSTITUTE

NUMBER 14 • APRIL 2002

## About the Cover

by  
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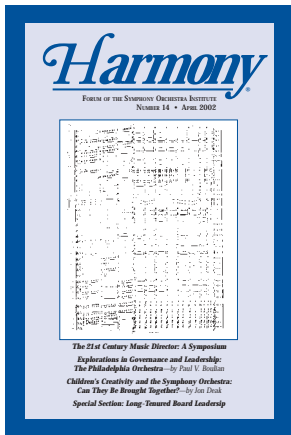
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## About the Cover



If you look closely at the score reproduced on the cover of this issue, with its gigantic orchestra (including quadruple woodwinds and eight horns), offstage brass, two choruses, children's choir, and seven soloists, you might logically guess that this is Mahler's Symphony No. 8, not unreasonably known as the *Symphony of a Thousand*. That nickname was coined by a Munich impresario (much to the composer's annoyance) as a marketing ploy in advance of the premiere there in 1910. In fact, it was surprisingly accurate: Mahler ended up using 858 singers and 171 orchestra members, for a total of 1,029 musicians.

When Mahler died the year after the premiere of the Eighth, the official inventory of his estate predicted that “in view of the colossal size of the work and huge number of performers it requires it must be assumed that it will be performed only rarely and in exceptional circumstances.” But on March 2, 1916—less than five years after Mahler's death—Leopold Stokowski gave the American premiere of the Eighth Symphony with the Philadelphia Orchestra (and five combined choruses). Stokowski even outdid Mahler in the sheer size of his forces, commanding 1,069 performers (including himself). What is remarkable about the Stokowski performance, however, is not the extraordinary army of musicians he amassed, but the mere fact that the piece was done at all.

Today we don't think of Leopold Stokowski primarily as a champion of new music. He's more likely to be remembered for his brilliant showmanship, his glamorous private life (he courted Garbo and married Gloria Vanderbilt), and for making records and motion pictures. Generations of music-lovers know him best in silhouette, shaking the hand of Mickey Mouse in Walt Disney's 1940 *Fantasia*, in which he conducted everything from Bach to broomsticks. Stokowski was one of music's great showmen, to be sure. He paid great attention to his podium attire and experimented with special lighting effects to show off his expressive hands and his regal profile. But he was also a very serious musician

with a taste for the new and unusual, and with a genuine curiosity about the avant-garde.

In his years of conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra, from 1912 to 1941, he not only polished the fabled sound of this great orchestra, but he made Philadelphia a center of important new music. The list of American premieres Stokowski gave in Philadelphia is staggering, with Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* coming only nine months after the Eighth Symphony. The 1920s brought Shostakovich's First Symphony; Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*; the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Symphonies by Sibelius; Webern's *Passacaglia*; and the world premieres of two landmarks by Varèse—*Ameriques* and *Arcana*. In the 1930s Stokowski introduced America to Ravel's G major Piano Concerto, Copland's *Dance Symphony*, Poulenc's Two-Piano Concerto, and Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder*, and led the world premieres of Copland's *Dance Symphony* and Rachmaninov's *Paganini Rhapsody* and Third Symphony.

He and the Orchestra even devoted Wednesday mornings to reading through new scores that couldn't be included in concerts. In 1933, the Philadelphia board asked Stokowski to play "no more debatable music," but he was unmoved. He premiered Shostakovich's First Piano Concerto and Stravinsky's *Mavra* the following year and gave the world premiere of Schoenberg's Violin Concerto a few seasons later. Never one to back down, Stokowski clearly didn't mellow with age: when he became music director of the Houston Symphony in 1955, he insisted up front on the right to lead a premiere at every concert.

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