

## Mahler and the way we hear!

*"In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the musician's way of thinking was fully determined by the specific function of such instruments as winds, strings, and certainly voice. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the focus was progressively shifted to the piano: this is a sad reality of our times".*

**Gustav Mahler** (1860–1911)



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How, actually, do we hear and tune our wind and string instruments today, even our voice, if not blindly awed by the piano and the equally-tempered system that it represents? How many wonderful musical sensations, that instruments of older periods would prompt musicians to, have we chosen to ignore?

Take, for example, the use of *double or triple courses* in construction of plucked instruments, this remarkable tradition which is still alive. Double strings, especially when tuned in octaves, obviously did more than colouring one instrument's timbre or enhancing volume: they reconciled sounds of farthest antiquity (ancient genres, Pythagorean diatonism, micro-intervals/beat-frequencies) with equal temperament. Audiences of older periods would indeed comprehend sound in a radically different way compared to our modern western societies that are conditioned to perceive tones as neutral mathematic units in the service of a restrictive acoustic platform, *intonation*. They would feel the brandishing of double courses' reverberations vibrating next to actual pitches; experience (always in the frame of each given tonality and polyphony) a multi-consonant texture of micro-intervals, similar to what a voice or a chorus would prompt them to, when improvising freely on a *cantus firmus* or a Byzantine sacred chant.

Of course, Mahler's statement concerns all aspects of musical experience: *hearing and sensing, learning and understanding, composing and interpreting*. It involves tuning, dynamics, phrasing. Let us just remember that **Beethoven, Schubert, Mozart** and **Haydn** were writing "*musical*" rather than "*pianistic*" phrasing in their piano works. And that most of **Bach's** violin or cello bowing-styles seem paradox unless comprehended as part of the *inner logic of each corresponding musical idea* that stands behind written notes.