Dancing with Mahler
MAHLER Symphony No. 9 (1908–09)

For this lesson you’ll need:
- Headphones or a speaker
- Space to move
- Something to write on and something to write with

A couple notes before we start …

Share with us!
Activities will be in the yellow boxes. Share your work with us on social media by tagging #mahlerny. Or email it to us at education@nyphil.org.

Click on the blue text!
Wherever you see blue text, you can click on it to find out more information about the word or topic. Try it out by clicking here: Mahler’s New York.

Now, let’s get started with a quick warm-up!
1. Find something to write with and write on.
2. Make a list of objects that are heavy, and a list of objects that are light.
3. Note what other characteristics (aside from being heavy and light) these objects have.
4. Keep your list handy for an upcoming activity!

Musical beats
Just like your heart, music has its own beat! Have you ever found yourself tapping your foot, clapping your hands, or moving your body along to your favorite song? Chances are, you were following the music’s beat!
A beat in music is a steady pulse. Steady is the key word here. Think about a ticking clock. A clock has a steady pulse. There are 60 seconds per minute, and you can also say there are 60 beats per minute. (Beats per minute also can be written as BPM).

In music, we organize our beats by using measures. A measure is a space to put your beats in, just like a drawer is a space to put your clothes in.

The beats in a measure can have different roles. They work together as a team to create a certain feeling and flow to the music. They achieve this by having heavier sounding beats and lighter sounding beats.

For example, let’s take a measure that has three beats (which can be indicated in a time signature as 3/4). Below, let’s break down the roles of each beat:

**Beat #1:** Imagine taking one of your heavy objects from your warm-up list and placing it down. Feel that sensation of heaviness and the strength it takes to carry that object. Beat #1 is a heavy beat or, as we call it in music, a “strong” beat.

**Beat #2:** Now, imagine taking one of your light objects and passing it over to the side. Feel the lightness. Beat #2 is a light, or “weak,” beat.

**Beat #3:** With your light object, imagine having an active arm, and that your hands are bringing the object up into the air. Beat #3 is a light but active beat, preparing us to go onto to the first beat of the next measure.

**Downbeats and upbeats**
The greatest emphasis is on the first beat — the strong beat. The first beat of a measure is also called a downbeat. When a conductor conducts the downbeat, their arm also goes down! So, a downbeat is a strong beat.

The second and third beats are not as strong as the downbeat. Both are on the weaker side: the second beat is our weak beat and the third beat is more active. The third beat propels you towards to the downbeat (first beat). We call the active third beat an upbeat. Conductors move their arms up when conducting upbeats.

Click here to watch how to conduct these beats in 3/4 and try it for yourself.
Time for some dancing
Beats are not only important for music, but also in dancing!

![Diagram of beats and rhythm](image)

Time for an activity!
Click [here](#) to try the “Arrange your Beats” activity.

Remember, you can share your activity with us on social media by tagging #mahlerney. Or you can email it to us at education@nyphil.org.

Our bodies have a way of naturally feeling the beat and wanting to move along with it. People can create dances that follow a certain beat and time signature. Choreographers can create a dance move for each beat, and a lot of times you will hear dancers counting while they are rehearsing their dance. It is also important for dancers to know where the strong and weak beats are. Many times, this will influence what type of dance move they will do on a specific beat.

Time for a listening activity!
Listen to this excerpt. As you are listening:
1. Try to hear the strong and weak beats. Notice how some notes sound stronger than others.
2. Pay attention to the beats and think about what it may look like if you were to dance along with this music. Is there a specific type of dance that would work well with the music?
What did I listen to?
You just listened to excerpts from Gustav Mahler’s Symphony No. 9. Mahler was an Austrian composer who wrote ten symphonies. He once said: “A symphony should be like the world; it should contain everything,” so his symphonies are often compared to a journey. Mahler’s music takes listeners through memories, sound, melodies, and musical textures.

For the second movement of his Symphony No. 9, Mahler tapped into his Austrian roots and composed music that could be used to dance a traditional Ländler dance. He even marks in the music “Ländler,” making sure that the musicians know what type of music they are playing. Mahler utilized the Ländler in many of his symphonies.

The Ländler
The Austrian Ländler is a folk dance that uses the time signature 3/4. Just like we discussed earlier in the lesson, the first beat (the downbeat) is strong. The second beat is more passive and light, and the third beat is more active, propelling you back to the downbeat (first beat). Some other dances that use three beats in a measure are the waltz and Spanish fandango.

The Ländler is a partner dance, which means you need a partner to dance with. It was usually danced in rural areas (the countryside). Mahler had a deep connection with nature and often went to the countryside for inspiration when he was composing. You can hear the nature and the countryside characteristics in his music.

For the Ländler, there are arm movements, hopping, and, at times, stomping. Sometimes people even yodel while dancing the Ländler! This You may have seen this dance in the movie The Sound of Music, when Maria and Captain von Trapp dance the Ländler together. Watch a traditional Ländler here.

Dance Research
Do you have a favorite dance? Or do you have a traditional dance from your culture? Research the time signature that dance uses, ask your parents or see if you can figure it out. See if you notice how the steps match in time with the beat.

You can share your dance and its time signature with us on social media by tagging #mahlerny. Or email it to us at education@nyphil.org.
Time for a listening activity!

Now that you know Mahler composed Ländler music, listen to these excerpts with the dance in mind. Mahler gives us some variety by having slow and fast versions of the Ländler. Notice the difference in tempo (how fast or slow) between the two Ländlers. Imagine how the dance would look when the tempo changes.

Write down your thoughts as you’re listening to this Ländler excerpt. What do you hear? What characteristics and moods are present? Do you hear the strong beats in the music versus the weaker beats?

Now, here is an excerpt of the slow Ländler. This time, try to move your body with the beat, or try to conduct along with the music!

Listen to the whole second movement of Mahler’s Symphony No. 9.

One last activity!

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If you were to re-create the Ländler, making your own version of the dance, what would it look like? Try it out either by recording your dance moves, writing it down, or drawing it out.

Thank you for taking part in this lesson! To continue learning about Mahler and his symphonies click here.