MAHLER Symphony No. 10 (1910) — Lesson 2

For this lesson you’ll need:

- Headphones or a speaker
- Pen or pencil
- Something to write / draw on
- Optional: music notation software, staff paper, instrument

Opening Reflection

Imagine that you are a musicologist a hundred years from now, examining an unfinished work by one of your favorite musical artists. You’ve been given the task of completing their work.

How would you go about trying to finish the work? What sources would you use to gather information? What would your process of completion be? Or would you advocate to leave the work untouched as the artist did when they stopped working on it?

Sketches of the third movement, Purgatorio, from Mahler’s Tenth Symphony.
Mahler’s Symphony No. 10 — Rumors, Hearsay, and Marginalia
Immediately following Mahler’s death in 1911, many musicians in his immediate circle commented on the existence (or possible non-existence) of his Tenth Symphony, often without having seen the manuscript at all. Composer Arnold Schoenberg said that any composer wishing to write a tenth symphony “must pass away.... It seems as if something might be imparted to us in the Tenth for which we are not yet ready.” Mahler’s close colleague Richard Specht said that the Tenth Symphony “will never come to performance” and that “Mahler asked that it should be burnt after his death.”

The manuscript that Mahler left behind also contained several evocative notes, many addressed to his wife, Alma. For example, at the end of the fourth movement he writes: “Ah! Ah! Farewell, my lyre! Farewell. Farewell. Farewell.” Also, at the very end of the piece: “To live for you, to die for you, Almschi!”

The discussion and mystique surrounding Mahler’s Tenth Symphony have made it an object of fascination and controversy to this very day. To learn more about the development and completion of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony after his death, check out Lesson 1.

Finishing Touches
The act of finishing another artist’s work after their death may seem daunting, but, as in the case of Mahler’s Tenth Symphony, it can also open up an entirely new and exciting world for both the original artwork and for the person completing it.

Activity 1: What Comes Next?
Listen to this incomplete version of the main violin theme from the first movement, Adagio. Is this phrase smooth and slow or fast and agitated? If you were to complete this musical idea, what would it sound like? Why?

Create a musical response to complete this phrase by singing, notating, or playing what might come next.

![Violin 1 Adagio](image-url)

Your response

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________
The musical idea you completed above was actually finished by Mahler. Check out the excerpts below to hear the many ways he completed this theme throughout the first movement.

**Excerpt 1** The first violins introduce the theme at the beginning of the first movement, accompanied by a chorus of horns and strings. Listen to the buildup that occurs when this chorale begins to comment on the violin melody.

**Excerpt 2** The melody, reharmonized, is played by flutes and violins. Listen for the playful interruption which almost derails the completion of the phrase.

**Excerpt 3** Near the end of the first movement, the melody is now played by the cellos, with brief commentary by violas and bassoons. How is the character of the melody different in this iteration, right before the end of the movement?

**ACTIVITY 2: More What Comes Next?**
Mahler wrote many handwritten notes in his original sketches for the Tenth Symphony, including an evocative description of the fourth movement, Scherzo, which he left unfinished. Mahler wrote:

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The Devil dances it with me
Madness, seize me, accursed one!
Destroy me
That I may forget that I exist!
That I may cease to be
That I for ...
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Listen to this sample of the fourth movement, and then **complete Mahler’s description:**

**Excerpt 4**

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The Devil dances it with me
Madness, seize me, accursed one!
Destroy me
That I may forget that I exist!
That I may cease to be
That I for ________________________________
_____________________________________
_____________________________________
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Activity 3: “Unfinished” Isn’t Only for Musicians
Musicians like Mahler weren’t the only people to create unfinished masterpieces. Artists from all disciplines have left behind unfinished artworks for many different reasons. Some unfinished works are still in the process of being completed to this day! Consider one of New York City’s greatest unfinished landmarks, The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine. Started in 1892, the famous cathedral — the record holder as the largest cathedral in the world — opened in 1911; to this day only 2/3 of the structure has been completed.

After reading this blog post about The Cathedral, draw or write about what you would add to finish it, or discuss why you think it’s already perfect the way it is.

To learn more about The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, please view this video.

Here are links to learn more about unfinished works:
Unfinished literary art
Unfinished music compositions
Unfinished visual art