

## **Selections from *Five Songs for Voice and Piano***

By Alma Mahler

Born August 31, 1879, in Vienna, Austria

Died December, 1964, in New York City

From an early age, Alma Mahler was musically active and keenly interested in composing. After her father's death in 1892, she concentrated primarily on piano. She studied composition from 1894 to 1901 with organist Josef Labor, and continued briefly with composer/conductor Alexander von Zemlinski until her marriage to Gustav Mahler in 1902.

Gustav sternly discouraged his wife from pursuing her musical work, essentially silencing her creative muse. However, when their young daughter, Maria Anna, died of scarlet fever in 1907, a severely depressed Alma began to have an affair with Walter Gropius (whom she would marry in 1915). Learning of the affair, an alarmed and greatly distressed Gustav encouraged Alma to prepare a set of five songs for voice and piano, which she had composed between 1899 and 1910, to be published in 1911. He actively promoted them and even arranged them for orchestra. These would be the only works by Alma Mahler published during Gustave's lifetime.

In all, Alma composed some 50 songs for voice and piano, along with orchestral pieces in other genres, though just 17 songs survive today, 14 of them published in her lifetime.

This CSO program features three of the five songs from her set published in 1911. The imaginative and impactful orchestral arrangements here, by Finnish composer and conductor, Jorma Panula, were first recorded by Finland's Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra in 2003.

Alma knew and deeply appreciated the works of the poets who wrote the words of these songs. These include *Die stille Stadt (The Quiet Town)*, by German poet Richard Dehmel; *Bei dir ist es traut (With You It Is Pleasant)*, by Austrian poet Rainer Maria Wilke; and *Ich Wandle unter Blumen (I Stroll among the Flowers)*, by German poet Heinrich Heine.

Tom Wachunas