

**Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 6**

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MUSIC

Collectors who like to keep a chamber of horrors in their CD library must not be without Scherchen's live Mahler Five. Did the Philadelphians know what they were in for when they finally lured the 73-year-old conductor over to America to give the work its first performance in its illustrious concert series? They got not only Scherchen's extremes of fast and slow, but a scherzo where the second waltz strain becomes a lethargic trio, the opening is repeated and the rest disappears until the coda, and a finale with a further 200-odd bars missing (for which the hagiographic booklet note fails to prepare us). Scherchen is invariably master of the mess he makes, but the opening trumpet solo is a disaster and the strings can barely be heard in the dismal Philadelphia acoustics. What a relief, then, to turn to Kubelík conducting the Sixth in Munich four years later. This is a performance of consistent headlong intensity, an inch or two more hair-raising than Kubelík's DG studio recording made the same month, and only relaxing at the still centre of the Andante: not perhaps for those who want to be clubbed over the head by Mahler's marches or scared out of their wits, but decidedly the work of a flexible genius among conductors.