

Ears and Hearts

He tried the music out first in Budapest,
1889, but there was considerable bewilderment—
including, according to one reporter,
"a small, but for all that audible, element
of opposition."

By 1900 the experience had been repeated,
complete with audience indifference,
in Hamburg, Wiemar (twice), and Berlin.

"Damn it all, where
do people keep their ears
and their hearts
if they can't hear that"
Gustav wrote to Alma.
And it took fifteen years
from start to finish,
before he would finally publish
his "Symphony Number One"

which allows me to sit here this evening,
thrilled by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra,
mind wandering to times
I recited a poem, then returned
to my seat wondering "Where
do people keep their ears,
and their hearts?"
put that particular verse away, resolved
never to read it in public again.

And before Mahler's final chords
have faded I have decided
to take one or two of these pieces
out for my next featured reading,
and the next
and then for the one after that too,
until someday, perhaps,
I will be able to offer you
a satisfactory answer
to this question.

Steve Bloom
May 2008