Hernan Tesler-Mabé, *Mahler's Forgotten Conductor: Heinz Unger and His Search for Jewish Meaning, 1895-1965* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2020), 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1487505165.

In this slim, facile biography, Hernan Tesler-Mabé brings the life of German-born émigré conductor Heinz Unger to bear upon discussions of Canadian Jewish identity and the nature of Jewish music, as connected through Unger's zeal for conducting Gustav Mahler's works. Although Tesler-Mabé's main argument too often trades on implication, the book nonetheless adds an interesting angle to scholarly considerations of the German-Jewish psyche, especially in its struggles to connect with the divergent interests of postwar Canadian Jewry.

In a clearly laid-out introduction Tesler-Mabé argues for the significance of Unger's story. Most effectively, he connects Unger's story with a scholarly stream of "everyday life" history, and especially finds significance in calling greater attention to Unger's complex sense of self as a German-Jewish refugee in Canada's Eastern European-descended Jewish population. Tesler-Mabé's efforts to link these issues to a new take on Jewish music, however, hold less traction. While he effectively critiques the narrow scope of Canadian editor-critic Israel Rabinovitch's 1952 book *Jewish Music, Ancient and Modern* among others, his argument that "Mahler's music represents a key site of German Jewish identity and that Unger's allegiance to this music therefore represents an evolving 'performativity' of his Jewish identity" (8) goes too far, in my view. Certainly there is merit in seeking meaning beyond musical content itself, including the broader intersections of musical identity and artistic life: and especially so through Mahler, whose relationship to Judaism has been the subject of some recent scholarship. Yet the evidence that follows struggles to support his opening claim.

The core of the book comprises an introduction, five quick chapters, and conclusion presenting Unger's life more-or-less chronologically. The first chapter covers basic foundational information: Unger's upbringing in Berlin, his 1915 decision to pursue music after hearing Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, his training and early conducting career, and his frequent trips to the Soviet Union. But then, in a puzzling decision, Tesler-Mabé splits the next portion of his hero's life into two parallel narratives: one (Chapter 2) on Unger's work in England, Spain and Latin America, and the other (Chapter 3) on Canada and Germany. While this separation allows Tesler-Mabé to explore different themes of Unger's life, the two chapters nonetheless make it more difficult to understand the cause-and-effect events that to me are necessary for understanding his sense of self. Despite this fragmentation, however, Tesler-Mabé's account still brings interesting insights, including the foundational role that amateur orchestras play for underappreciated conductors—a theme that fol-

lows Unger amid persecution and displacement, and through his work in Germany, England, and Canada.

Throughout the rest of the book, Tesler-Mabé chronicles a man of German-Jewish birth who programmed Mahler into his concerts with some frequency, at times connected with Jewish communities, and occasionally described himself as a "Jewish conductor." And yet, the pieces as presented don't quite connect. Instead, Tesler-Mabé relies heavily on circumstantial evidence to establish Mahler as a channel for Unger's German-Jewish identity, often seeking to will that evidence into truth by limiting the interpretive frame. In chapter four, for example, where Tesler-Mabé deals most directly with Unger's Jewish identity, he connects Unger's 1949 defence of Nazi-associated conductor Wilhelm Furtwängler as an event that directly "poisoned" (82) his chances of representation by Jewish starmaker agent Sol Hurok a decade later, but notes Hurok's non-response to a request for representation as the only proof. Tesler-Mabé similarly appears to overread Unger's self-description as a "Jewish conductor" during his futile attempts to secure a conducting invitation from the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in the late 1950s (72–77), overlooking the possibility that Unger simply fronted his Jewish identity to get a prime gig (as others did). These two rebuffs undergird the subsequent shaky claim that "by [the late 1950s] Unger was becoming increasingly assured in his devotion to his German Jewish identity, at least insofar as it was expressed by way of his allegiance to Mahler" (84). After years of reading undercooked studies that attempt to channel implicit Jewish identity into musical motivation, I found these juxtapositions psychologically intriguing but intellectually unconvincing.

Tesler-Mabé, however, uses this implied fusion of German Jewish identity and Mahler's music to interpret Unger's drive to introduce the composer to the Canadian public—with only modest success. Which is why it is so odd that Tesler-Mabé only once presents anything close to a direct connection between Mahler and Jewishness in his primary sources, via an address that Unger, in his last months, delivered during an award dinner honouring his receipt of the Commander's Cross of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany (97). The rest of the book bears a metaphorical resemblance to its cover: as Unger, in a classic knuckles-to-chin profile, peers profoundly through the darkness at a slight upward angle. Tesler-Mabé gazes similarly at a goal that he sees clearly, but that, at least to me, remains fuzzy.

Tesler-Mabé ends the book by completing his subject's resolute arc toward (an unappreciated) Jewish identity in Canada. With overstated pathos, he offers the tragic conclusion that "Unger was, like the Golem, a child of the Jewish people [who] broke through the bounds of the Jewish community, emancipated and set loose upon a world that did not understand him or his intentions… [but unlike the Golem] Unger was not taken back by the Jewish people… [h]e was cast adrift, his legacy left to grow

ever dimmer" (105). It is exciting to learn about Unger's eventful, unjustly forgotten life and archive, buoyed by Tesler-Mabé's passion for reconstructing the conductor's story (the book also includes a 75-page appendix painstakingly listing the maestro's every known concert, as well as a separate index for composers and compositions). That passion on its own might itself be convincing to some; but I ultimately find it to overtake persuasive argument. Tesler-Mabé respectably expands the tantalizing parallels between Mahler and Jewishness into Canada's borders, but he also joins his predecessors in struggling to give Mahler a central role as catalyst of Jewish identity.

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