recordings:

Mahler's Fifth

By Michael Feirtag

The powerful Fifth Symphony marked the beginning of a second phase in Gustav Mahler's composing career. Behind him were a series of song cycles, and the first four symphonies, whose thematic material and moods red-brew heavily upon the songs. The Fifth was to be the first of three entirely orchestral symphonies, the first product of Mahler's decision to compose pure music, without the human voice, whose need he had previously felt to express his musical thoughts.

The Fifth is a giant—two vi- olen opening movements, the first a slow movement, a funeral march but often melancholy scherzo, the usual Mahlerian adagio, i.e., sentimental, verging on maudlin—and a typically dis- tressed finale. The Fifth is perhaps more schizoid than the mawkish-and a typically dis- tressed finale. The Fifth is perhaps more schizoid than the...