# Kindertotenlieder, Gustav Mahler

### Introduction

Gustav Mahler's Songs of the Deaths of Children is a cycle of five songs for solo voice and orchestra on poems by Friedrich Rückert about the deaths of children and the feelings of their surviving parents, drawn from his personal experience. In this song, the text explores the painful irony of a parent experiencing the sunrise while mourning the death of a child in the night. The speaker expresses the cruelty in the permanence of the natural cycle of existence in the face of such an impermanent state.

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| Nun will die Sonn' so hell aufgeh'n,  Als sei kein Unglück die Nacht gescheh'n!  Das Unglück geschah nur mir allein!  Die Sonne, sie scheinet allgemein!    Du musst nicht die Nacht in dir verschränken,  Musst sie ins ew'ge Licht versenken!  Ein Lämplein verlosch in meinem Zelt!  Heil sei dem Freudenlicht der Welt! | Now would the sun so brightly rise  as if no misfortune had happened during the night!  The misfortune happened to me alone!  The sun, it shines on everyone!    You must not enfold the night within you,  You must immerse it in everlasting light!  A little lamp went out in my tent!  Hail to the joy—light of the world |

Mahler's setting of this text heightens its meaning. The regular use of dissonance suggests the anguish of the speaker and the melodic direction (ascending or descending) mocks the claims of the text. For example, Mahler sets the first line, a declaration of the rising sun, with a mournful descending melody. In addition to these features, Mahler mixes major and minor modes freely, suggesting the instability of the speaker.

**Audio Recordings**

Below are several links to various recordings of this piece:

* [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4r0omjTiRX4)
* [Spotify](https://open.spotify.com/track/4JW4CWZMY8a6B5bsOohDUT?si=ba7b2c43267c401b)

### Reflection Questions

1. How would you characterize the melody of this work?
2. How does the instrumentation contribute to the meaning of the poetry?
3. How does the texture of the music engage with the sentiment of the poem?

Read this online at <https://open.byu.edu/new/kindertotenlieder_gustav_mahler>