Gustav Mahler’s Seventh Symphony stands out as one of the most provocative symphonic statements of the early twentieth century. This book offers a new interpretation of the Seventh based on a detailed study of Mahler’s compositional materials, combined with a close reading of the finished work. The Seventh has often been heard as “existing in the shadow” of the Sixth Symphony or as “too reminiscent” of Richard Wagner’s opera Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg. Focusing on sketches previously considered as “discarded,” this study reveals unexpected connections between the Seventh and both the Sixth and Meistersinger. These connections confirm that Mahler’s compositional project was firmly grounded in a dialogue with works from the past, and that this referential aspect should be taken as an important interpretive key to the work. Providing the first thorough analysis of the sketches and drafts for the Seventh, this book sheds new light on its complex compositional history. Each movement of the symphony is considered from a double perspective, genetic and analytic, showing how sketch studies and analytical approaches can interact with each other. The compositional materials raise the question of Mahler’s reception of Richard Wagner, and thus lead us to rethink issues concerning his own cultural identity. A close reading of the score enlightens these issues by exposing new facets of Mahler’s musical humor. The Seventh moves away from the tragedy of the Sixth toward comedy and shows, in a unique way within Mahler’s output, that humor can be taken as a form of transcendence.