

DONALD RUNNICLES CONDUCTS MAHLER'S SIXTH SYMPHONY

9 & 11 APRIL 2026

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House



SYDNEY
SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA

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SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

The Orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS CONCERT

Expect to enjoy yourself! Maybe your heart will beat a little faster. Maybe your hair will stand on end. It's hard to predict or describe how the vast sound of a symphony orchestra will affect each of us. Just bring an open mind and engage with the music – close your eyes, watch the conductor and the musicians, or just sit back and let the music take you away.

When do I clap?



Good question. Most pieces of music are broken up into different movements – usually, people only clap at the end of a piece, so there will be silent pauses between movements. On the next page you will see how many movements the pieces in this concert have, and the duration of each piece. But the simplest thing is to wait until the conductor turns around – or when everyone else starts applauding.

The conductor may leave the stage and come back on a few times, and acknowledge the different sections of the orchestra. You can keep clapping as long as you want to – and feel free to cheer and stomp your feet if you really enjoyed the concert!

Can I take photos or videos?



You can take photos and videos on your phone during the applause at the end of a piece of music. **Please switch your phone to silent, make sure the flash is off and dim the brightness of your screen so you don't distract other audience members.** And if you share it to your socials, tag us in your posts! We love seeing what people have captured.

Please leave professional and semi-professional camera gear at home and limit yourself to a phone camera inside the venue.

2026 CONCERT SEASON

DONALD RUNNICLES CONDUCTS MAHLER'S SIXTH SYMPHONY

THE HAMMERBLOWS OF FATE

Donald Runnicles conductor
**Musicians of the Australian National Academy
of Music (ANAM)**

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)
Symphony No.6 in A minor (1903–04)
i. Allegro energico, ma non troppo. Heftig, aber markig
ii. Scherzo: Wuchtig
iii. Andante moderato
iv. Finale. Allegro moderato - Allegro energico

Thursday 9 April, 7pm
Symphony Hour
Saturday 11 April, 2pm
Great Classics

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

Pre-concert talk

By Gordon Williams
in the Northern Foyer,
at 6.15pm (Thursday)
and 1.15pm (Saturday)

Estimated durations

The concert will run for
approx. 1 hour and 30
minutes, with no interval

Cover image

By Jay Patel

ABC Classic

Saturday's performance
will be recorded for
broadcast on 1 May at 1pm,
and streaming online.

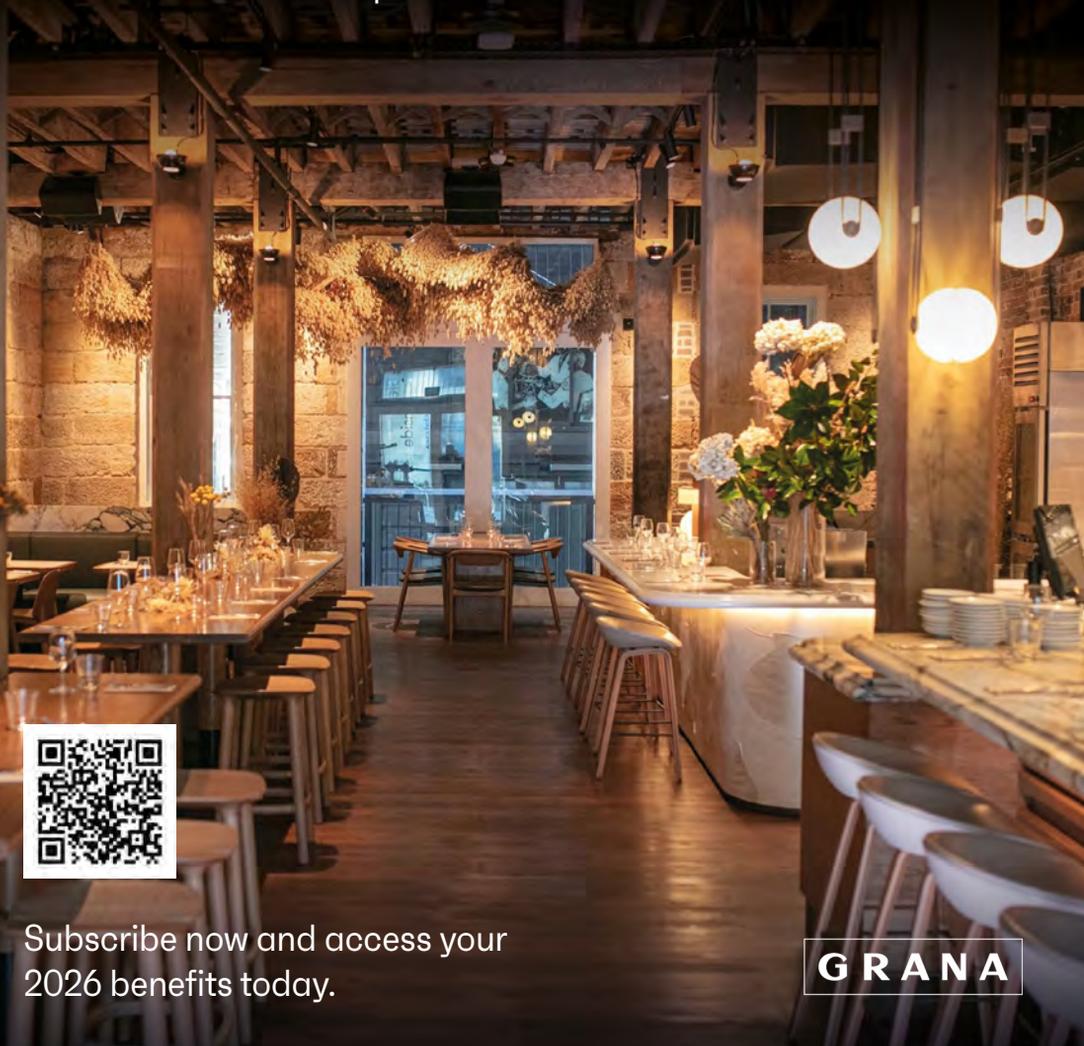
We acknowledge the Gadigal
people of the Eora Nation,
the traditional custodians of
the land and water on which
we work and perform. We
pay our respects to their
Elders past and present.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

DONALD RUNNICLES conductor

Over a career spanning 45 years, Sir Donald Runnicles has built his reputation on enduring relationships with several of the world's most significant opera companies and orchestras. He is especially celebrated for his interpretations of the Romantic and post-Romantic repertoire which are core to his musical identity.

The 2025-2026 season is one of transition: it marks both his final season as Music Director of the Deutsche Oper Berlin as well as his first season as Chief Conductor of the Dresden Philharmonic. He also continues to serve as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.

Sir Donald concludes his tenure with the Deutsche Oper Berlin with Wagner's *Der Fliegende Holländer*, new productions of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* by Michael Thalheimer and Korngold's *Violanta* by David Hermann, all culminating in two cycles of Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* in a Stefan Herheim production that he premiered with the company. Over the course of his sixteen-year tenure, Sir Donald cemented himself as one of the central figures in the German cultural scene.

In Sir Donald's inaugural season as Chief Conductor with the Dresden Philharmonic in 25/26, he leads ten weeks of programs including a concertante version of Strauss' *Elektra*, highlights his British heritage with performances of William Walton's Viola Concerto with British violist Timothy Ridout, and Scottish composer Sir James MacMillan's Symphony No.4 (originally composed to celebrate Sir Donald's 60th birthday), and concludes the season with a ten-city Asia tour of Japan and Korea.

He returns to conduct four weeks as Principal Guest Conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra with performances of Shostakovich's Symphony No.5 and Violin Concerto No.1 with violinist Leonidas Kavakos, as well as Tchaikovsky's Symphony No.5. Guest engagements for the 25/26 season include performances with San Francisco Symphony,

the BBC Scottish Symphony and his debut with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

Sir Donald spends his summers as Music Director of the Grand Teton Music Festival. This eight-week festival of symphonic and chamber music, five of which are conducted by Runnicles, takes place amid the breathtaking beauty of Grand Teton National Park.

Past chief artistic leadership roles include the San Francisco Opera (1992-2008), BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra (2009-2016), and the Orchestra of St. Luke's (2001-2007). Sir Donald was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra for more than two decades (2001-2023).

A regular guest conductor with the Chicago Symphony, Runnicles' performance history with the orchestra dates back to 1997. Over a decade-long relationship with the Vienna State Opera, he led new productions of *Parsifal*, Britten's *Billy Budd* and *Peter Grimes*, as well as pieces from the core repertoire. He's conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and the Orchestre de Paris, among many of the world's leading orchestras.

Donald Runnicles was born and raised in Edinburgh, Scotland. He was appointed OBE in 2004, and was made a Knight Bachelor in 2020. He holds honorary degrees from the University of Edinburgh, the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama, and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

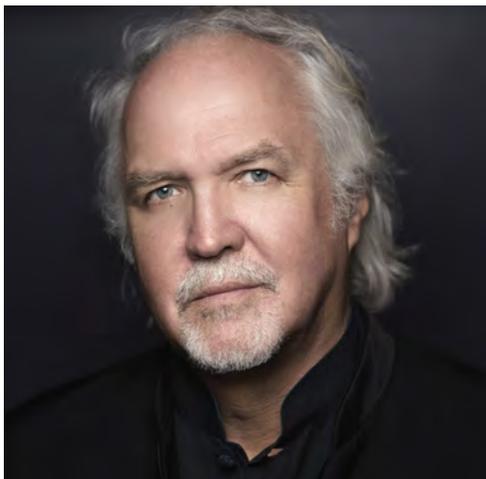


Photo by Simon Pauly

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

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ANAM
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The Australian National Academy of Music (ANAM) is an international, dynamic and outward-facing cultural institution, training and performance company, with a demonstrated commitment to engaging with its communities. Celebrating its 30th anniversary in 2026, ANAM is internationally renowned as the only purely classical music performance training academy in Australia, and one of the few in the world.

ANAM has industry partnerships with over 20 organisations, including the Australian Chamber Orchestra, the Sydney, Tasmanian, Melbourne and West Australian Symphony Orchestras, the Auckland Philharmonia Orchestra, Musica Viva Australia, a range of national music and arts festivals, and internationally with the Berliner Philharmoniker, Bayerisches Staatsorchester (Munich), Mahler Chamber Orchestra (Berlin) and London's Royal College of Music.

Alongside NIDA, the Australian Ballet School, NAISDA Dance College and other leading institutions, ANAM is a member of the Australian Government-funded Arts8 group of performing arts training organisations. The Arts8 are committed to providing the high level and intense studio-based training necessary to ensuring that the national performing arts sector has a pipeline of creative talent that will enable it to continue telling Australian stories for generations.

ANAM alumni are found in many of the world's leading orchestras and ensembles, and ANAM's intensive schedule brings together a global network of artists and performers who provide invaluable mentorship and guidance for emerging young musicians through public performances, in-residence masterclasses and other programs.

Find out more at anam.com.au

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC

First Violins

Olivia Kowalik
Miriam Niessl

Second Violins

Olivia Bartlett
Hannah Tyrell

Viola

Mattea Osenk

Cello

Heesoo Kim

Double Bass

Maddison Furlan

Flute

Emica Taylor

Oboe

Alex Tsang

Clarinet

Karen Chen

Bassoon

Stephanie Sheridan

Horns

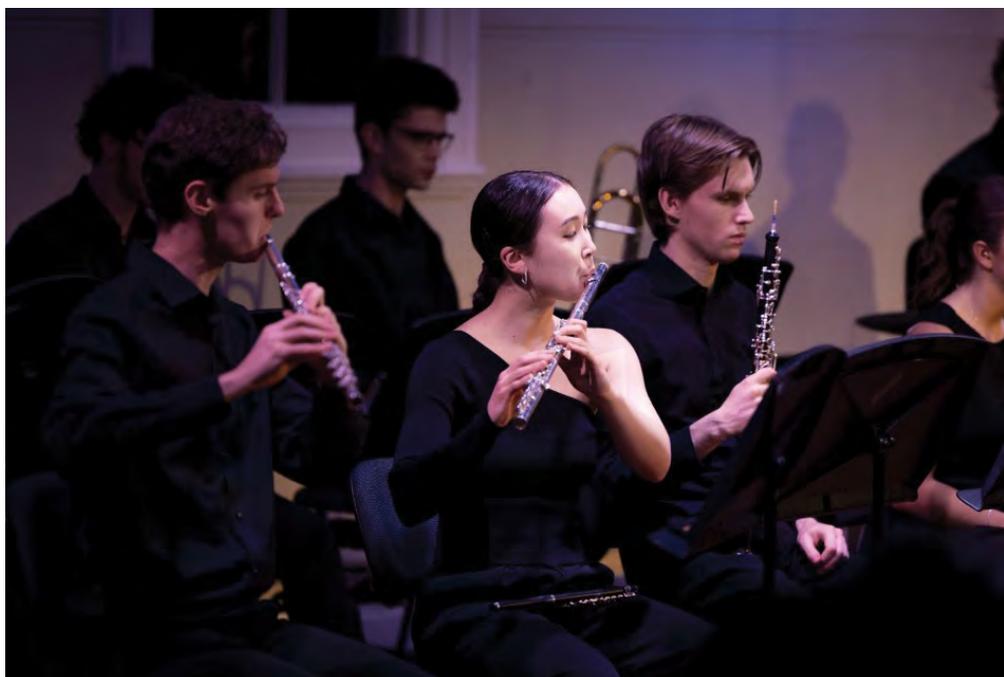
Tom Allen
Ciara Wrede

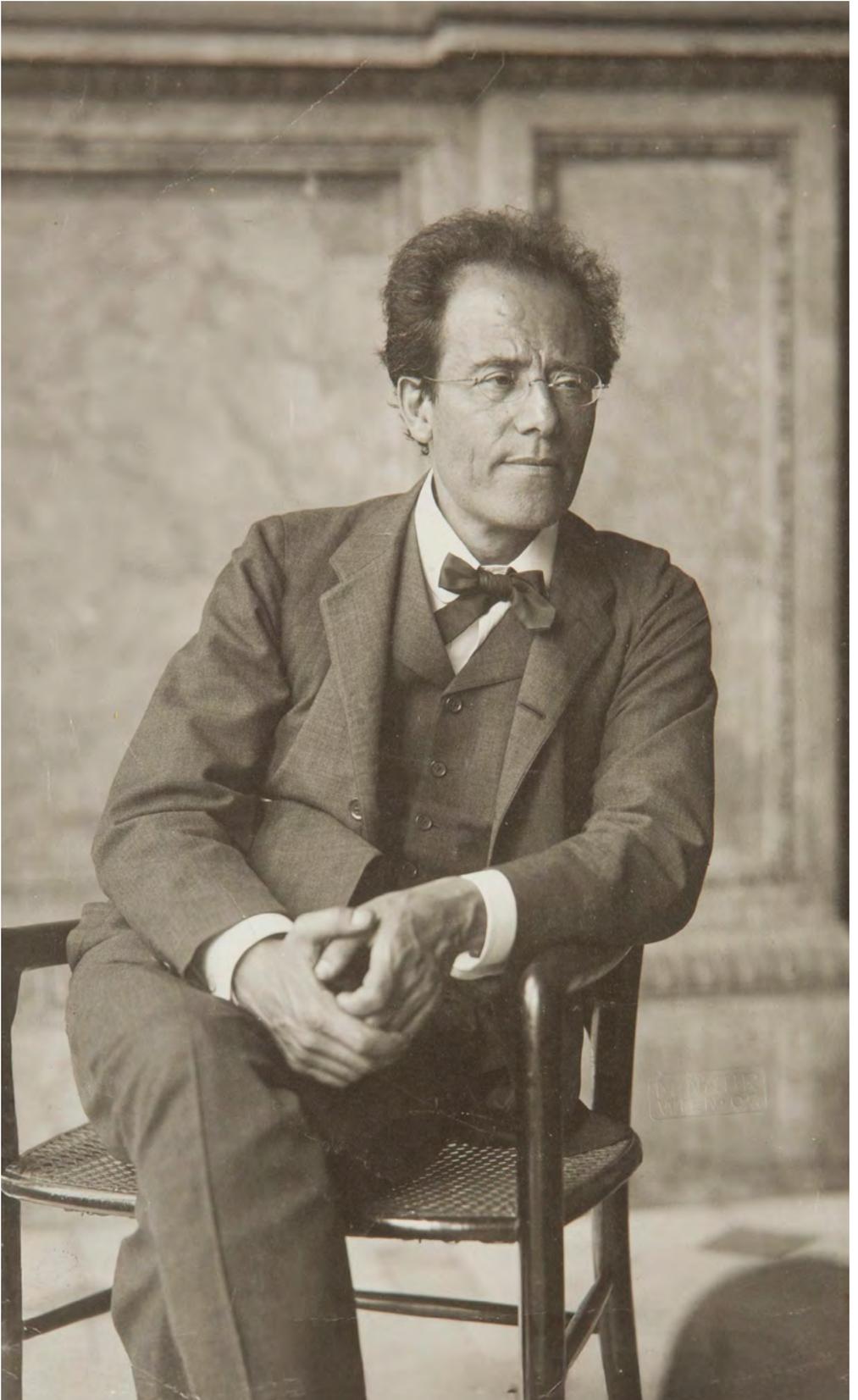
Trumpet

Elizabeth Dawson

Percussion

Jonathan Parker





1907 photograph of Mahler by Moritz Nähr (1859–1945).

ABOUT THE MUSIC

ABOUT GUSTAV MAHLER

One day Mahler's violent father was beating his wife, as he did all too often, and the child Gustav raced into the street in terror, to be confronted by an organ grinder playing the folk-song O, du lieber Augustin. We have this story thanks to Sigmund Freud, whom Mahler consulted professionally in 1910 and who, in a 1925 letter, retailed it. Freud concluded that 'in Mahler's opinion, the conjunction of high tragedy and light amusement was from then on inextricably fixed in his mind, and the one mood inevitably brought the other with it.'

Mahler was born in 1860 into a Jewish family in Kaliště (Kalischt), Bohemia, which soon moved to Jihlava (Iglau, now in the Czech Republic) where Mahler, one of the few of his 13 siblings to survive childhood, grew up. In 1871 he began studying at the Conservatorium in Prague, and then in 1875 enrolled at the Conservatorium in Vienna.

He was a star student, mentored by Anton Bruckner and others, and while winning prizes for piano and composition was also drawn to conducting. He held conducting posts in Cassel, Prague, Budapest, Hamburg and, from 1897, at the Vienna Court Opera. After ten years during which he was legendary for his high musical and dramatic standards, he was undermined by professional jealousy and anti-Semitism (despite his conversion to Catholicism many years before). In 1907 he left Vienna ultimately to work in the New York with the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic.

For much of his life he composed only on summer holidays, usually in some picturesque part of Austria which offered hiking opportunities. He completed his First Symphony in 1887 (the year he befriended Richard Strauss), which, like its three successors, draws on his body of song.

Leonard Bernstein famously said that the 20th century 'is the century of Death, and Mahler is its prophet', but there's more to Mahler than the Romantic cliché of the death-wish. His work is characterised by a vastness of scale (though great delicacy of orchestration) and often shocking changes of emotional register (as in the 'Augustin' story) and fusion of styles that can evoke shining vistas, popular song and dance, heroic struggle, tragedy and sublimity.

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MAHLER AND THE SYMPHONY

Apart from the unfinished Piano Quartet of 1875 and the early cantata *Das Klagende Lied* (The Song of Lamentation, written in 1880 but not performed until 1901), Mahler's output consists of solo songs and symphonies.

It is customary to divide the symphonies into sub-groups. The first four all rely in some way on pre-existent material (there is a notorious minor-key version of 'Frère Jacques' in the First), but more notably Mahler's song settings of folk texts from the collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn). The *Resurrection* Symphony (No.2), for instance, uses two songs, one as the purely instrumental Scherzo, and one, *Urlicht* (Primordial Light) sung as a standalone movement. The Third and Fourth use 'Wunderhorn' texts, the Third in its penultimate movement and the Fourth in its Finale.

The Third is the longest symphony ever composed, though as the philosopher Theodor W Adorno noted, after this 'prodigal extension of time' and 'panic abundance', Mahler retreated briefly into the more classical dimensions of the Fourth.

The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh are all purely instrumental works, though not without links to extant songs – the famous Adagietto of the Fifth relates strongly to the song 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' (I am abandoned by the world).

The Eighth stands alone as the first fully choral symphony ever written, setting the medieval hymn to the Holy Spirit, *Veni Creator spiritus*, before a slab of Goethe's *Faust*, and is something of an anomaly in its atmosphere of affirmation: as Adorno notes from the Fifth on Mahler's works 'hardly risk the notion of transcendence', their climactic moments never uncompromised.

In 1907 Mahler, recently diagnosed with a serious heart ailment, knew better than to tempt fate by announcing that he was writing a ninth symphony, nevertheless producing a symphony by any other name, *Das Lied von der Erde* (The song of the earth) with its final, gentle vision of eternity.

But it wasn't to be Mahler's last word – nor indeed was the actual Ninth Symphony. And even though the sketches for the Tenth contain verbal indications that Mahler is saying 'farewell', we need to remember also that he no doubt intended to finish the piece, were he to be spared. Fortunately this work has been completed – quite differently – by musicologist Deryck Cooke and conductor Rudolf Barshai.



A cover for the score of Mahler's Fourth Symphony, Universal Edition (plate number U.E. 2944) c.1910. Source: IMSLP/Wikimedia Commons.

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ABOUT THE SIXTH SYMPHONY

Mahler was worried. In May 1906 his Sixth Symphony had just received its first performance at the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein's festival in the German city of Essen, and his friend and colleague Richard Strauss had made the offhand remark that the work was 'overscored'. Strauss's remark may have been facetious; it was after all at around this time that his *Salome* was premiered, and *Salome's* orchestration sounded to Giacomo Puccini like a 'badly mixed Russian salad'. But Mahler was worried. According to the young conductor Klaus Pringsheim (who witnessed the exchange) Mahler kept coming back to Strauss's comment. He 'asked without envy, without bitterness, almost humbly, reverently, what might be the reason why everything came so easily to the other composer and so painfully to himself; and one felt the antithesis between the blond conqueror and the dark, fate-burdened man'.

In his monograph on Mahler, the influential Marxist writer Theodor Adorno caricatured Strauss as a 'blond Siegfried, a balanced harmonious individual who is supposed, singing like a bird, to shower as much happiness on his listeners as is falsely ascribed to him'. By contrast, Adorno argued, Mahler's music reflects the increasing impotence of the individual in late bourgeois society. Mahler's theme is 'broken-ness'; his use of folk music, high romantic *Angst*, bird calls, cowbells and military marches are all ultimately ironic reminders of the fragmentation of society and the self. For Adorno, Mahler's best music dramatises the discontinuity of the world.

Unlike Strauss, Mahler was suspicious of music which needed the explanatory prop of a 'program', but this is not say that Mahler's music is not at some level about non-musical ideas. In many ways Mahler's Sixth Symphony is comparable to Strauss' *Ein Heldenleben*: Mahler himself conceded that the work has a 'hero' who faces an inexorable fate – but the crucial difference is that Mahler's music acknowledges the fear of inevitable oblivion. Mahler's Fifth Symphony trod a familiar Beethovenian

path from darkness to light, dramatising the overcoming of various obstacles before final victory. The Sixth by contrast offers no such comfort. The hero may love and fight and occasionally triumph but we are all in the end 'snared in an evil time'.

So the answer to Mahler's own question about why everything came so much more easily to Strauss might be that in Mahler's music there is much more at stake. According to the composer's widow Alma 'none of his works moved him so deeply at its first hearing as this'. In her memoirs, Alma Mahler tells of how, after the dress rehearsal of the Sixth, she went backstage to find 'Mahler walking up and down in the artists' room, sobbing, wringing his hands, unable to control himself...'

Alma Mahler's accounts of her life have been described as unreliable and occasionally mendacious. Her description of the scene, for instance, continues with the appearance of – who else? – Strauss, who 'came noisily in, noticing nothing. "Mahler, I say, you've got to conduct some dead march or other before the Sixth – their Mayor has died on them – so vulgar this sort of thing – But what's the matter?" and out he went as noisily as he came, quite unmoved...' (A marginal note Strauss wrote in his copy of her book amounts to a perplexed denial of the story.) Nevertheless Mahler's emotions at having composed such as work as this must have been intense. As composer and writer Andrew Ford has noted, in the Sixth Symphony 'it is as though Mahler has deliberately destroyed his own world, and if Alma Mahler's story...is perhaps a little exaggerated, it's not actually implausible'.

Mahler first four symphonies mine his many song-settings of folk poetry from the collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* and three of them contain significant vocal elements. His three central symphonies are all works of 'absolute' as against programmatic music. Nevertheless, his Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies derive some of their thematic material from two sets of songs to poetry by Friedrich Rückert (1788–1866), the song-cycle *Kindertotenlieder* (Songs on the death of children) and five

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songs (which do not constitute a cycle) which include the masterpieces 'Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen' and 'Um Mitternacht'. (Alma describes the *Kindertotenlieder* and Sixth Symphony as premonitions of the death of their daughter and the onset of Mahler's heart-condition.)

For all its epic scale the Sixth is the work, as Mahler put it, of 'an old fashioned composer' in that it is cast in a traditional four movement design. From the outset, though, its tone – which led to the occasional use, even in Mahler's time, of the nickname *Tragic* – is unambiguous. A fully scored A major chord, underpinned by an obsessive rhythmic motif from the timpani, fades and, as it fades, changes to the minor mode. This is music which will end in darkness. The movement begins as a march, though as scholar Michael Kennedy points out it is not the triumphant approach of spring as in the Third Symphony, or the doom laden funeral march of the Fifth. It is, as Kennedy puts it, 'modern music [that] marches in with this sinister tramping start'. The movement's starkly contrasting second subject is a lyrical tune which rises and falls largely by step. Alma describes how, when Mahler began work on the piece on their summer vacation in 1903, 'after he had drafted the first movement, he came down from [his study] to tell me he had tried to express me in a theme. "Whether I've succeeded, I don't know; but you'll have to put up with it."' Its contour and mood certainly relate to any number of Romantic love-themes. Mahler's treatment of it, too, reminds one of Berlioz's use of the Beloved's *idée fixe* in the *Symphonie fantastique*: it is always slightly varied on each appearance. In any event, the yearning lyricism provides a perfect foil for the implacable march with which the movement begins – 'change and conflict are the secret of effective music', as Mahler said. Another unique aspect of this work is the celebrated evocation of alpine scenery first heard toward the end of the movement. This striking sound world was said by Mahler to represent the 'last earthly sounds heard from the valley below by the departing spirit on the mountain top'.

Perhaps anticipating bafflement from future performers he noted that 'the cowbells should be played with discretion – so as to produce a realistic impression of a grazing herd of cattle, coming from a distance, alternately singly or in groups, in sounds of high and low pitch.' Apparently unaware of the contradiction he went on to say that 'special emphasis is laid on the fact that this technical remark admits of no programmatic interpretation'.

Mahler never quite resolved the issue of the order of the two central movements (and thereby hangs a complex tale of revisions and editions). Originally the Scherzo followed the first movement, but Mahler tried it out with the Andante second and Scherzo third before swapping them back. (This performance maintains Mahler's original intention.) The Scherzo too has an insistent rhythm to begin with (which may have prompted Mahler to delay it). There is much Mahlerian irony in this movement, both in the dry clattering of the xylophone and what Kennedy calls the 'delicate pastiche Haydn'. The oboe conjures up an innocent, rustic world, and the metrical changes – described by Mahler as *altväterlich* (literally 'old-fatherly') – may recall a Bohemian folk song. As a caution against over-interpreting, it should be noted that the Scherzo has been interpreted as 'diabolical' and 'catastrophic' on one hand, where Alma's reminiscences insist that it depicts the 'tottering' of their children at play before the intrusion of tragedy at the end of the movement.

The Andante represents a complete contrast with both the Scherzo and the Finale, and its thematic reference to the *Kindertotenlieder* may give some credence to the theory that the Scherzo dealt with Mahler's family life. But the tone is hardly tragic. Rather, with its horn calls and reminiscence of the cowbells it is poignant and romantic, a relaxation of the tension before the turbulence of the Finale.

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The Finale is one of Mahler's largest and most complex structures, and it bears the weight of the symphony as a whole, recalling material from earlier in the work. Its introductory section contains much of the material that will be developed as the movement unfolds, particularly the impassioned melody heard first high in the violins. The movement depicts a nightmarish world, where the *allegro energico* builds intense excitement and momentum, straining towards climactic release, only to be brutally interrupted on three occasions. Mahler originally included a sickening thud 'like an axe-stroke' at each of these points, but later omitted the third out of superstition. Adorno wrote that in Mahler 'happiness flourishes on the brink of catastrophe', and that the immense climaxes of the Sixth's Finale 'bear their downfall within themselves'. Mahler himself said that the movement describes 'the hero on whom falls three blows of fate, the last of which fells him as a tree is felled'. The piece ends in dissolution: drum rolls, fragmentary motifs, a baleful and comfortless A minor. No wonder Mahler was worried.

Gordon Kerry © 2025, 2006

Mahler's Sixth Symphony is scored for a very large orchestra – the largest purely instrumental forces Mahler ever wrote for – consisting of piccolo, 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling 2nd and 3rd piccolos), cor anglais, 4 oboes (3rd and 4th doubling 2nd and 3rd cor anglais), 3 clarinets, E flat clarinet (doubling 4th clarinet), bass clarinet, 4 bassoons and contrabassoon; 8 horns, 6 trumpets, 4 trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, celeste, harp and strings.

It received its world premiere on 27 May 1906 in Essen, Germany, with the Essen Philharmonic conducted by Mahler himself.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra gave the Australian premiere of the work in February 1971, when John Hopkins programmed it at a Proms concert.

Other notable performances include those led by Hopkins again (1976), Charles Mackerras (1984), Stanisław Skrowaczewski (1988), David Zinman (1992), Edo de Waart (1999), Yannick Nézet-Séguin (2007) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (2011).

Our most recent performances were in 2018, conducted by Simone Young.

Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson



A contemporary caricature of Mahler's unorthodox use of a hammer in the Sixth Symphony. The text says: "My god, I forgot the car horn! Now I can write another symphony." From Austrian magazine *Die Muskete*, 19 January 1907.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

LISTENING TO MAHLER

We walk into the concert hall, leaving our daily lives behind us, about to listen to a symphony that may occupy the entire program, or may dominate whatever shares the program with it. The music will be concerned with the great riddles of existence. There will not be much in the way of classical purity, of Beethoven's ruthless exclusion of superfluities. We might hear two musics played on- and off-stage simultaneously, the sound of band marches and Austrian country dances – this is a regional voice – mixed in with tunes of the most ecstatic sentimentality. Other melodies will be pulled out of shape and re-harmonised, screaming anger and defiance. It will be music that seeks to envelop its audience, that asks us to forget its grand time-scale, that flourishes on its own rituals and epiphanies.

Gustav Mahler's symphonies contain music of the greatest complexity and sophistication, and of the greatest naïveté and simplicity. Many proclaim the triumphal certainty of life after death and the weariness and pain of earthly disappointment. And they do so in a manner that does not seem likely to appeal to an age such as ours, in which public discourse is dominated by the lure of the eternal present: the 24-hour news cycle, indispensable devices starting with a small 'i' and the depthless wisdom possible in 140 characters – such things draw us ever closer to the surface of observed life.

Yet Mahler's symphonies, all of which are lengthy and discursive, are staples of musical life all over the world. In the twin anniversaries of 2010 (the 150th anniversary of his birth) and 2011 (the centenary of his death), an international onslaught of performances and recordings added to the considerable weight of Mahler music-making. New recordings of his major works seem to appear every month. Of the *Resurrection* Symphony alone, 100 different recorded performances are available whereas, only 50 years ago, Mahler's music was something of a rarity. It was hardly played at all in Vienna; in Britain, the first performance of Mahler's Third Symphony (1896) was not given until 1961; while in Australia the Mahler revival

began, fitfully, in 1946, with performances of the Fourth Symphony. Due to the advocacy of the Concertgebouw Orchestra's chief conductor, Willem Mengelberg, whom Mahler had known well, Amsterdam remained the only major centre for Mahler performance.

What can explain this dramatic turnaround in Mahler's posthumous reputation? Many people have nominated the arrival of the stereo long-playing record as the deciding event. Mahler's spatial experiments, his music's many subtle instrumental colours and huge range of dynamics, could not be captured adequately on the fallible shellac of the 78rpm record. The length of the pieces was also problematic: when the recording of Bruno Walter's 1938 concert performance of the Ninth Symphony was first published, it took up 20 record sides. When it was transferred to LP it took three. This same recording now occupies one CD.

The stereo breakthrough occurred at a time when an increasing number of conductors were taking up Mahler's music. Led by Otto Klemperer, Walter, Jascha Horenstein and the influential conducting teacher Hans Swarowsky, the next two generations of conductors – Leonard Bernstein, Georg Solti, Herbert von Karajan, Claudio Abbado, Zubin Mehta – began to perform his music with growing frequency.

But these things do not explain the appeal of Mahler's music to a broad public all over the world. It did not take multiple recordings of Górecki's Third Symphony for that work to be sought out by many millions of people – it took only one (and a large marketing budget). Riccardo Muti's advocacy on behalf of Scriabin in the 1990s did not lead to a flood of subsequent performances. The essence of the Mahler revival lies in the way the music speaks to us of experiences we recognise as our own.

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This manifests itself in ways large and small, but overridingly in Mahler's emotional honesty. As Donald Tovey put it, Mahler had no inhibitions. The possibility of experiencing the trivial and the tragic at once, so much a part of the fabric of Mahler's music, is after all a fundamental modern experience, but a rare one to have been captured in music in Mahler's day. Novelists, though, were beginning to build it into the structure of their work. When Thomas Mann, discussing Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent*, wrote that modern art ceases to recognise the categories of tragic and comic, and that 'modern artists see life as a tragi-comedy', he might have been writing of Mahler's entire output.

Mahler's use of the march rhythm as a metaphor for human activity is his most frequent recurring device of this kind; the first movements of the First, Second, Third, Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, all basically in march time, draw on a great range of musical idioms and convey a vast range of feeling. This vastness, unconcerned with the niceties of style, was, for the most part, out of favour between the two world wars, a time when Stravinsky questioned the ability of music to express anything, and when the construction of musical systems – neo-classicism, the tone row – was the dominant feature of the age. There was also the tragic reality of the Nazis' ban on performances of Mahler's music in Central and then Eastern Europe from 1933. As a born Jew all his music, like that of Mendelssohn, was automatically forbidden. In fact it was included in the famous Degenerate Music exhibition held in Düsseldorf in 1938.

Mahler's most succinct statement about his desire to depict the breadth of life experience in his music has been left to us in the record of his meeting with Sibelius, which took place while Mahler was conducting concerts in Helsinki in 1907. As Sibelius recalled the encounter:

When we came to speak of the nature of the symphony, I used to emphasise my admiration for strictness and style...and the deep logic which unites all the themes by an inner bond. This was in accordance

with my own creative experience. Mahler took a completely opposite view: 'No, the symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.'

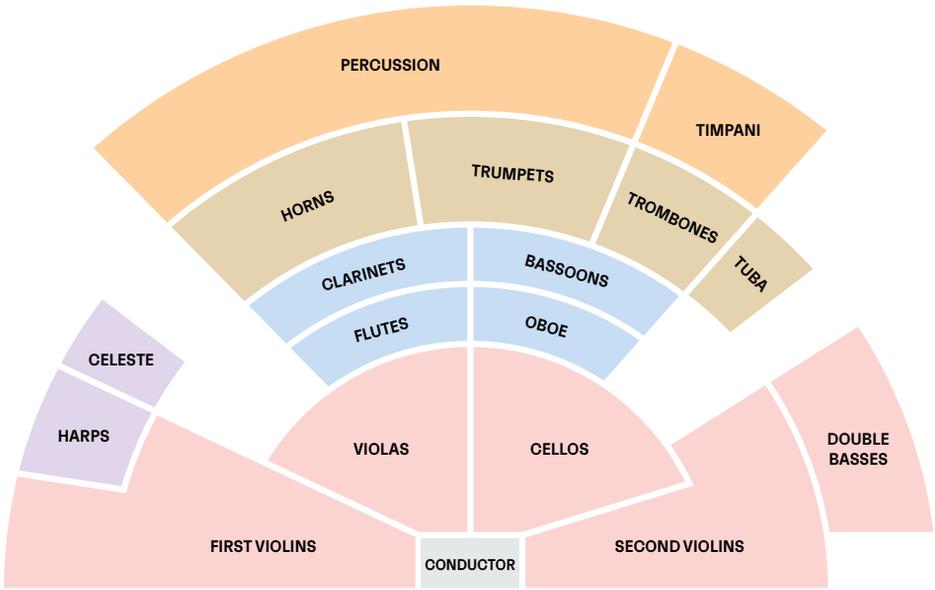
In attempting this Mahler embraces his audience also, but in doing so might be seeking solace, reconciliation or recognition. We feel this in the last movement of the Sixth, when exultant optimism is turned repeatedly to despair; in the blissful Andante of the *Resurrection*, a reminiscence of a moment when, in Colin Wilson's description, 'the world has temporarily established a truce'; and in the mad exultation of the Third Symphony's long first movement, in which Mahler's orchestral virtuosity is, for once, exuberantly affirmative.

Now that critics and audiences are less concerned about musical style, Mahler's all-inclusiveness is anything but dubious. In fact, despite its profoundly personal voice, his music has become emblematic of our era in a way Mahler could not have predicted. He said, it is true, 'my time will come', but that so much of our century's destruction, alienation and sheer human suffering seems to speak to us from his music was for us to find, and we have found much about these things in Mahler that is poignant and true.

In fact it could be argued that Mahler is the first composer of our global village. In his famous book *Music Ho!* (1934), Constant Lambert discusses the universality of modern urban experience. He observes that, unlike the barrel-organ songs of the 1820s, which were often celebrations of specific localities, popular songs, such as Noel Coward's *Twentieth Century Blues* (1932), could 'hit off the atmosphere of post-war life in any venue'. Is Mahler not the first 'modern' composer to have done this also? If Coward, in his own way, laments that 'in this hurly-burly of insanity our dreams cannot last long...In this strange illusion....people seem to lose their way' does not Mahler tell us of this also? Is it any wonder that we have taken him with us into our millennium?

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