

MAHLER'S SEVENTH

Friday and Saturday, January 26-27, 2018 at 8 p.m.

Sunday, January 28, 2018 at 2 p.m.

Helzberg Hall, Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts

MICHAEL STERN, conductor

MAHLER

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor

I. Langsam - Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo

II. Nachtmusik: Allegro moderato

III. Scherzo: Schattenhaft

(Fließend, aber nicht schell)

IV. Nachtmusik: Andante amoroso

V. Rondo Finale: Tempo I (Allegro ordinario)

Tempo II (Allegro moderato ma energico)

This concert will be presented without an intermission.

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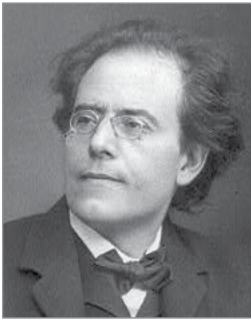
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Gustav Mahler composed his Symphony No. 7 during a time when relaxing summers in the Austrian countryside offered a brief respite from his frenetic musical life in Vienna. To a degree, the Seventh Symphony seems to reflect the dichotomy of Mahler's existence.

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor (1905)

84 minutes

2 piccolos, 4 flutes, 3 oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, tenor horn, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, deep bells, rute, tambourine, bass drum with attached cymbals, orchestra bells, snare drum, tam-tam, triangle, cymbal, herdbells, guitar, mandolin, two harps and strings.

During the first decade of the 20th century, Gustav Mahler's responsibilities as Kappellmeister in Vienna limited his composing to the summer months. In 1901, Mahler constructed a villa at Maiernigg, located on the banks of the Wörthersee in southern Austria. It was there, during summer breaks, that Mahler wrote many of his greatest works, including symphonies 5-8 and the song cycle *Kindertotenlieder*.

Mahler composed his Seventh Symphony during the summers of 1904 and 1905. He wrote the second and fourth movements in 1904. In a 1910 letter to his wife, Alma, he wrote:

In art as in life I am at the mercy of spontaneity. If I had to compose, not a note would come ... (In the summer of 1905) I made up my mind to finish the Seventh, both Andantes of which were there on my table. I plagued myself for two weeks until I sank into gloom, as you well remember; then I tore off to the Dolomites. There I was led the same dance, and at last gave it up and returned home, convinced that the whole summer was lost... I got into the boat to be rowed across. At the first stroke of the oars the theme (or rather the rhythm and character) of the introduction to the first movement came into my head — and in four weeks the first, third and fifth movements were done.

In the early part of 1906, Mahler put the final touches on his Seventh Symphony. In September 1908, Alma traveled to Prague to hear her husband conduct the world premiere on the 19th.

The premiere inspired mixed receptions. Alma recalled, “The Seventh was scarcely understood by the public. It had a ‘succès d’estime,’ winning critical appreciation but only modest popularity.” Critics and audiences have often been hard-pressed to reconcile the finale’s bravura, irrepressible C-major optimism with the intense drama of the work’s opening, the sardonic humor of the central scherzo, and the hushed beauty and mystery of its surrounding “Night Music” movements.

It is an enigmatic work, but a successful performance can have an overwhelming impact, as it did upon the young Arnold Schoenberg. After hearing the Vienna premiere, Schoenberg wrote Mahler, “The impression made on me by the Seventh, and before that, by the Third, are permanent. I am now really and entirely yours.”

I. Langsam; Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo: The symphony opens with a slow-tempo introduction. Over the repeated tread of the winds and strings, a solo tenor horn intones a dotted-rhythm theme. Mahler compared this horn call to the roar of a stag (“Hier röhrt die Natur” or “Here roars Nature”). The introduction finally resolves to the start of the principal, quick-tempo march section, with a fortissimo statement by the horns of a theme once again derived from the music of the introduction. The violins sing a radiant, flowing melody in C major. The march episode returns as the exposition concludes. Mahler’s extended development of the principal thematic material

The symphony is in five movements. The intense drama of the opening movement yields to the hushed beauty and mystery of the first of two “Night Music” movements. The sardonic humor of the central scherzo precedes the final “Night Music” movement, the beguiling additions of a guitar and mandolin. The brilliant, irrepressible finale plunges the music into the blazing sunshine.

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features a wide variety of moods and instrumental effects. The orchestra's tread heralds a varied recapitulation of the introduction and principal Allegro. The irrepressible momentum of the final measures is capped by the orchestra's fortissimo exclamation.

II. Nachtmusik. Allegro moderato: The first of the two "Night Music" movements opens with a haunting exchange between two horns, the second muted. Other instruments soon take up the motif, decorated by woodwind passages evoking the sounds of birdcalls (in the final portion of the movement, Mahler directs that this music be played "Wie Vogelstimmen" — "like the voices of birds"). A whirlwind descending chromatic passage leads to the horns' introduction of the central march theme punctuated by violins and based upon the Nachtmusik's opening horn motif. These three principal elements — the horn dialogue, birdcalls and march — return throughout, sometimes alternating with contrasting sections.

III. Scherzo. Schattenhaft (Fließend, aber nicht schnell; in den Anfangstakten noch etwas zögernd) (Flowing, but not fast; hesitant in the opening bars): Mahler directs that the scherzo, the work's briefest movement, be played in "shadow-like" fashion. The main section is a danse macabre, an angular waltz punctuated by ghoulish orchestral interjections. The central trio offers a somewhat brighter mood, but has eerie moments as well. Both the opening section and trio return in varied form, as the scherzo slithers to an abrupt close.

IV. Nachtmusik. Andante amoroso: For the symphony's final "Night Music," Mahler reduces his large orchestra to a chamber-like ensemble. Two additions to the scoring create a magical effect, as a guitar and mandolin make their only appearance in the symphony. Alma wrote that when Gustav composed the second "Night Music" movement of this symphony, he was beset by visions of "murmuring springs and German romanticism." The movement is in a rather expansive A-B-A form.

V. Rondo Finale. Allegro ordinario: After three consecutive movements exploring shadow and night, Mahler propels the music into blinding sunshine. Over pounding timpani and orchestral fanfares, the trumpets offer a fortissimo statement of the rondo's

central theme. The mood briefly calms, and the oboes introduce a genial subsidiary theme, punctuated by trills in the flutes and clarinets. After a reprise of the principal rondo theme, there is a playful, *grazioso* theme. This trio of themes returns throughout, with the first predominating. Toward the close, the horns triumphantly reprise the principal melody of the symphony's opening movement, as the finale hurtles to a blazing resolution.

RECOMMENDED RECORDING

Mahler: Symphony No. 7

Chicago Symphony Orchestra / Claudio Abbado, *conductor*

Label: DG Masters Catalog # 44513

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