Season Finale: Vänskä Conducts Mahler’s Fourth

June 14, 15, 16

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Carolyn Sampson, soprano | R. Douglas Wright, trombone
Kari Sundström, trombone | Andrew Chappell, bass trombone | Steven Campbell, tuba

Thursday, June 14, 2018, 11 am Orchestra Hall
Friday, June 15, 2018, 8 pm Orchestra Hall
Saturday, June 16, 2018, 8 pm Orchestra Hall

We gratefully acknowledge the support of Louise and Doug Leatherdale in the presentation of these concerts, and their support for the work of Osmo Vänskä.

James M. Stephenson

Pillars *
Andante
Passacaglia
Spirito

R. Douglas Wright, trombone | Kari Sundström, trombone
Andrew Chappell, bass trombone | Steven Campbell, tuba

Intermission

ca. 20’

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 4 in G major

Bedächtig, nicht eilen (Deliberately, do not hurry)
In gemächliger Bewegung, ohne Hast (Moving easily, without haste)
Ruhevoll (Serene): Poco adagio
Sehr behaglich (Very leisurely)

Carolyn Sampson, soprano

* World premiere; commissioned by the many friends of Bill Zehfuss, in his memory

CD signing: Join us in the lobby after the June 16 concert as Osmo Vänskä will sign the Orchestra’s Mahler symphony CDs.

Text and translation for the fourth movement of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony appears on page 40, and the translation will be projected as surtitles.

Concert Preview with Grant Meachum, James M. Stephenson and R. Douglas Wright
Thursday, June 14, 10:15 am, Auditorium

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Kevin Smith
Friday, June 15, 6:55 pm, Auditorium
Saturday, June 16, 6:55 pm, Auditorium

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of Classical Minnesota Public Radio, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.
R. Douglas Wright, trombone
R. Douglas Wright has been the Minnesota Orchestra’s principal trombone since 1995. Among the major solo works he has performed here are Aho’s Symphony No. 9 for Trombone and Orchestra and the world premiere of Schwertsik’s Trombone Concerto. Since 2005 he has performed concerts around the world with the World Orchestra for Peace. He has served as principal trombone of the Cleveland Orchestra, assistant principal trombone of the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, second trombone of the Boston Pops Orchestra and principal trombone of the Rhode Island Philharmonic, and he was a member of the Empire Brass Quintet.

Andrew Chappell, bass trombone
Andrew Chappell joined the Minnesota Orchestra as bass trombonist in 2014 after serving as bass trombonist of the Rochester Philharmonic, Santa Fe Opera and New World Symphony. He performs regularly with the Burning River Brass ensemble and the Slap-Happy Whackamole Steam Gang. He has performed with orchestras including the Houston Symphony, Cincinnati Symphony, Finnish Radio Symphony, Malaysian Philharmonic, Nörköping Symphony, Toronto Symphony and National Ballet of Canada Orchestra.

Kari Sundström, trombone
A native of Sahalahi, Finland, Kari Sundström joined the Minnesota Orchestra in 1996 after having been a member of the Helsinki Philharmonic. He has been featured in Sommerfest concerts and on the Orchestra’s Chamber Music series, most recently performing a Sibelius brass septet and Hindemith’s Morgenmusik. He graduated from the Juilliard School of Music, where he studied with Per Brevig. In 1991 he was named Finland’s brass player of the year.

Carolyn Sampson, soprano
Carolyn Sampson, now making her Minnesota Orchestra debut, performs regularly at the BBC Proms and with orchestras such as the Bach Collegium Japan, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Rotterdam Philharmonic, Leipzig Gewandhaus and Vienna Symphony Orchestra, as well as numerous orchestras in the U.S. She has also appeared with English National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Scottish Opera, Paris Opera, Lille Opera, Opéra national de Montpellier and Opéra national du Rhin. She was a featured artist in the 2014-15 season at Wigmore Hall, and she has presented recitals at Amsterdam’s Concertgebouw and at the Saints and Aldeburgh Festivals. She made her Carnegie Hall recital debut in 2013. Her extensive discography has earned recognition including multiple Gramophone Awards and nominations, and the Diapason D’Or. She was also nominated for Artist of the Year in the 2017 Gramophone Awards. More: maxinerobertson.com.

Steven Campbell, tuba
Steven Campbell has been featured as soloist several times since joining the Minnesota Orchestra as principal tuba in 2005. Before arriving in Minnesota, he performed with the Boston Symphony and Boston Pops Orchestras and was a member of the Rhode Island Philharmonic and the Vermont Symphony. He has also performed with the Milwaukee Symphony, New Mexico Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Colorado Symphony, and Seattle Symphony and Opera. In May 2014, he premiered James Stephenson’s trio Vast and Curious at the International Tuba conference.
When nine people were massacred in June 2015 at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina, James Stephenson was deeply affected. His artistic response was to compose a work for chamber orchestra titled *there are no words*. The piece has since been played in several countries, notably by young people, who have communicated to Stephenson how much the music moved them. “This is why I compose: to try to reach people where words can’t,” he says. “I’m gratified that victims of that awful shooting continue to be remembered through my music.”

**memories of a close friend**

*Pillars* is about a different kind of memory rooted in that same South Carolina city—that of a close friend: Bill Zehfuss, the longtime principal trombone of the Charleston Symphony, who died in 2014 at age 52. A group of Zehfuss’ friends pooled resources through a Kickstarter campaign and commissioned Stephenson to compose a low brass concerto in his memory. Stephenson is well positioned to do so. A graduate of the New England Conservatory, he played trumpet in professional orchestras for 17 years before becoming a full-time composer, and has a deeply ingrained sense about what brass players do best. He has extensive experience writing for orchestra, wind ensemble, chorus, soloists and chamber ensembles. More to the point, he has composed some 30 instrumental concertos, one for nearly every standard orchestral instrument, and several that feature multiple brass instruments. He is sensitive to the challenges of writing multi-instrument concertos. “It’s a difficult task, because you want to feature each player individually, but also—in this case—highlight the low brass as a section,” he explains.

This commission was different from others he has received, not only because Bill Zehfuss was a personal friend, but also because Stephenson and Minnesota Orchestra principal trombone R. Douglas Wright (“Doug” to friends) go way back: they played in a brass quintet together at New England Conservatory. In part, Zehfuss and Wright gave the piece its title. “Bill was tall, and Doug is tall; that’s one reason for the name *Pillars,*” Stephenson explains. Another explanation for the title is its three-movement structure. “I knew that one movement of this piece would be solely dedicated to Bill,” says Stephenson. “That became the second movement, and I felt it needed surrounding ‘pillars.’ Those are the first and final movements.”

His most important reason for choosing the title, however, was the determination and commitment from so many individuals who wanted to honor Bill Zehfuss, enabling this piece to come to fruition. “The initiators of the project were Wilson Ochoa, horn player and now Boston Symphony librarian, tuba player Michael Grose and bass trombonist Dan Satterwhite—all friends of Bill Zehfuss, of course,” Stephenson explains. “The widespread funding support they spearheaded was truly inspirational. People from all backgrounds—ranging from non-musicians to the most distinguished professional players—contributed from all over the world so that this piece might get created. The respect and love they showed for Bill made me think of them as pillars of our community.”

**the music: surprising and satisfying**

*Pillars* Premiering: June 14, 2018

The concerto opens with a chorale-like passage that functions like a slow introduction. “Doug [Wright] really wanted to feature the low brass quartet sound in a chorale; that’s why it opens with that,” says Stephenson. “Then they all play in unison, which is another beautiful sonority—and something that might...
surprise an audience. For me, a piece is always about surprising and then satisfying an audience. Then repeat that!"

**Passacaglia.** Stephenson's central movement, the “Zehfuss” movement, is titled *Passacaglia.* On one level, it is a bow to tradition—the passacaglia is an ancient form—but Stephenson stresses that his is not a literal passacaglia; for example, the bass line is not always present. “It retained enough of the characteristics for me to feel that I could use the term. This movement is all about Bill, and it features orchestral ‘tears’ as the principal motive.” This second movement incorporates the low brass cadenza, accompanied by reduced strings.

**Spirito.** Stephenson wrote the finale with a Latin groove. He explains his reasons: “The last time I saw Bill was when I conducted the Charleston Symphony in a program of all Latin music that featured the orchestra’s brass quintet as soloists. Bill was standing adjacent to the podium—next to me—virtually all night. We went out afterward to celebrate and had a great time. This finale seemed like a suitable tribute.

“The other reason was my last performance here in Orchestra Hall, when the Minnesota Orchestra premiered my Violin Concerto *Tributes* in 2012. They opened those concerts with some Ginastera, and knocked it out of the park! So that memory played a part in what I wrote as well.” He adds that the finale uses sleigh bells in its ‘blues-y’ part, a conscious nod to Mahler, whose Fourth Symphony—which follows Stephenson’s work on today’s program—also features sleigh bells. Stephenson’s walking bass and *jazzy* passages, which veer between “raunchy” (his description) and passionate, contribute to a rousing finale for this piece showcasing low brass.

**Learning from the masters**
Stephenson acknowledges a debt to Mahler—and every other composer he’s ever heard, living or dead. “Playing in an orchestra for all those years, those composers whose music I performed on a weekly basis became my teachers,” he says. “I listened carefully to how my colleagues reacted as they rehearsed and performed—both liking and hating it—and how the audience responded and, most importantly, what I found most interesting about their harmony, orchestration, melodies, counterpoint—and the risks they took.” All these factors have pulled together in Stephenson’s world premiere this weekend, which showcases both the talented Minnesota Orchestra low brass section and Stephenson’s own unique understanding of these instruments and the orchestra. His personal connection to Bill Zehfuss, whose memory *Pillars* honors, is an added bonus.

**Instrumentation:** 2 solo trombones, solo bass trombone and solo tuba with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (1 doubling piccolo and alto flute), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, china cymbal, splash cymbal, 3 suspended cymbals, 2 bongo drums, cabasa, conga drum, hi-hat, kick drum, ratchet, sand blocks, shakers, slap stick, sleigh bells, tambourine, temple blocks, triangle, suspended triangle, wood block, crotales, glockenspiel, vibraphone, chimes, xylophone, marimba, harp and strings

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**Gustav Mahler**

**Born:** July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia

**Died:** May 18, 1911, Vienna, Austria

**Symphony No. 4 in G major**

**Premiered:** November 25, 1901

If Mahler composed a *Pastoral* symphony analogous to Beethoven’s, then this is surely the one. Opening with sleigh bells and lyrical, warm melodies, Mahler’s Fourth is the most endearing of all his large orchestral works, successfully enveloping us in the sunlit world of children.

The Fourth Symphony is traditional in its overall layout: four movements arranged sonata-allegro, scherzo/trio, slow movement and finale (in this case a rondo). Thus the Fourth is, for most listeners, immediately more accessible than other Mahler symphonies. Its lighter scoring (with no low brass; the trombone and tuba soloists featured on this program’s previous work are done for the day), shorter duration, clarity of texture and predominantly sunny character have all contributed to make it one of Mahler’s most popular works. Musicologist Michael Kennedy calls it his “happiest, least spectre-ridden symphony.”

**Last of the Wunderhorn symphonies**

Mahler began work on his Fourth Symphony during summer 1899 and completed it in August 1900. The piece thus conveniently spans the turn of the century, and in many ways it is a symbol of Mahler’s bi-directional stance: reflective of the traditions that preceded him, and looking forward to the changes that lay ahead.

After completing the Symphony No. 4, Mahler moved for several years to an exclusively instrumental idiom for his symphonies. But the Fourth is spiritually and textually linked to the world of the first three symphonies, particularly Nos. 2 and 3, both of which use voices. These earlier symphonies, including the Fourth, are generally grouped together as the *Wunderhorn* Symphonies, since they all in some way draw upon Mahler’s settings of texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth’s Magic Horn). This
collection of anonymous German folk poetry was compiled by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano in the early years of the 19th century. Goethe valued it highly, and the collection remained influential in Germany’s romantic nationalist movement.

In the case of the Fourth Symphony, the most obvious Wunderhorn movement is the finale, which features a soprano soloist. Mahler originally planned to incorporate the song “Das himmlische Leben” (The Heavenly Life) into his Third Symphony. Listeners who know Mahler’s music will note a strong bond—sometimes even identical snatches of music—between the themes of the Third and Fourth Symphonies. He worked on “Das himmlische Leben” as early as 1892; however, he took a while to find the appropriate musical forum for his ideas. In a letter to Natalie Bauer-Lechner, he wrote:

“What I had in mind was extremely hard to achieve; the uniform blue of the sky being much more difficult to render than all its changing and contrasting hues. Well, that’s the general atmosphere of the piece. Occasionally, however, it darkens and becomes phantasmagorical and terrifying: not that the sky becomes overcast, for the sun continues to shine eternally, but that one suddenly takes fright; just as on the most beautiful day in a sunlit forest, one can be seized with terror or panic. Mysterious, intricate and sinister, the Scherzo will make your hair stand on end, but it will be followed by the Adagio, which puts everything right again and shows that no harm was intended.”

The fourth movement song, delivered by soprano soloist, is an expression of joy, heaven perceived through a child’s eyes. After the journey of the three preceding movements, it is both our destination and our reward. For a composer who insisted he was the antithesis of Richard Strauss and a proponent of absolute music, this is a highly programmatic work.

tough love: a “persecuted step-child”

Ironically, the Fourth Symphony was not well-liked during Mahler’s lifetime, and it took a long while to work its way into public affection. When it received its New York premiere in 1902, one critic wrote: “Strauss’s Heldenleben and Thus Spake Zarathustra are clear as crystal waters in comparison with Gustav Mahler’s Fourth Symphony.” In a 1903 letter to the German conductor Julius Buths, Mahler refers to it as “this persecuted step-child that has so far known so little joy in the world.” Perhaps that is the reason Mahler continued to revise this and other works for almost ten years. More than a century after Mahler began to work with the Wunderhorn poetry, his music shows us a tender, joyous side to his personality, a childlike viewpoint that believes in a heaven where angels bake bread, fish swim happily into the net, and St. Peter looks benevolently on.

of special note: the scordatura scherzo

According to Paul Bekker’s 1921 study, Mahler described the first two movements of the Fourth Symphony thus: “A dream excursion into the heavenly fields of Paradise, starting in the first movement with lively sleigh bells and leading through alternatively smiling and melancholy landscapes to Freund Hein (Death), who is to be taken in a friendly, legendary sense, as gathering his flock and leading it with his fiddle from this world to the next.”

Mahler marked his second movement “In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast” (Moving easily, without haste). His subtitle was “Freund Hein spielt auf” (Friend Hein strikes up). “Friend Hein” is a colloquial German reference to an ominous folk character who appears as a friendly fiddle-playing itinerant, gathering followers whom he leads to the great beyond. In short, he symbolizes Death.

The fiddle in question is intentionally mistuned, a technique called scordatura. It results in a peculiar, otherworldly sonority and also makes it possible to play pitches not available with conventional tuning. In this case, the concertmaster tunes his or her instrument up a whole tone. Most concertmasters use two violins for Mahler’s Fourth, one tuned normally (with the open strings G/D/A/E), and the other tuned up a whole step (A/E/B/F-sharp). The idea with the scordatura violin is to approximate the sound of a country village fiddler.

Mahler wanted an eerie quality, according to his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner, who published her Recollections of Gustav Mahler in 1923. She reported that, when he revised the Fourth Symphony, he altered the violin solo, rewriting the part in D minor instead of E minor. “This makes it screeching and rough sounding,” she wrote, “as if Death were fiddling away.” The mysterious scherzo is a fleeting shadow in this otherwise sunny work.

Instrumentation: solo soprano with orchestra comprising 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling E-flat clarinet and 1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, sleighbells, tam-tam, triangle, glockenspiel, harp and strings.

This week’s performances of James M. Stephenson’s *Pillars* mark its world premiere. It is the second concerto by Stephenson to be premiered by the Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä’s direction; his Violin Concerto *Tributes*, which was commissioned by the Minnesota Commissioning Club, premiered in April 2012 with Jennifer Frautschi as soloist. In addition, Stephenson’s Sonata for Trombone and Piano was performed at a Minnesota Orchestra chamber music concert in April 2011 by one of today’s soloists, Principal Trombone R. Douglas Wright, and his wife Laurinda Sager Wright.

The Orchestra added Mahler’s *Fourth Symphony* to its repertoire on November 18, 1921, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer on the conductor’s podium. This concert came near the start of Oberhoffer’s final season as the Orchestra’s music director. The Orchestra has never before made a commercial recording of Mahler’s Fourth Symphony, but it will do so later this month as part of a Mahler symphony cycle for BIS Records, two CDs of which have already been released—the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies.

“Last summer, the Minnesota Orchestra and its music director, Osmo Vänskä, launched their ambitious Mahler recording cycle with...Mahler’s popular Fifth Symphony. Good as that album was—it earned a Grammy nomination for best orchestral performance—the orchestra’s new recording of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony ups the ante considerably. The Sixth is a titanic work, placing extreme technical and emotional demands on the players. And the orchestra meets those demands, thrillingly, with this new recording.”

– Terry Blain, *Star Tribune*, March 30, 2018

Mahler’s Fourth Symphony: *Das Himmlische Leben (Life in Heaven)*

Wir geniessen die himmlischen Freuden,
Drum tun wir das Irdische meiden.
Kein weltlich Getümmel
Hört man nicht im Himmel!
Lebt alles in sanftester Ruh!
Wir führen ein englisches Leben,
Sind dennoch ganz lustig daneben!
Wir tanzen und springen,
Wir hüpfen und singen,
Sankt Peter im Himmel sieht zu.

John lets the little lamb out,
And Herod the Butcher lies in wait for it.
We lead a patient, innocent, patient
Dear little lamb to its death.
Saint Luke slaughters the ox
Without thought or concern.
Wine doesn’t cost a penny
In the heavenly cellars.
The angels bake the bread.
Good greens of every sort
Grow in the heavenly vegetable patch.
Good asparagus, string beans,
And whatever we want!

Ganz Schüsseln voll sind uns bereit!
Gut’ Apfel, gut’ Birn und gut’ Trauben!
Die Gärtner, die alles erlauben!
Wollt Rehbock, wollt Hasen,
Auf offener Strassen sie laufen herbei!

Soll’ ein Fasttag etwa kommen,
Alle Fische gleich mit Freuden angeschwommen!
Dort läuft schon Sankt Peter
Mit Netz und mit Köder
Zum himmlischen Weiher hinein.
Sankt Martha die Köchin muss sein.
Kein’ Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden,
Die uns’rer verglichen kann werden.
Sind die englischen Stimmen
Zu tanzen sich trauen!
Sankt Ursula selbst dazu lacht!
Cäcilia mit ihren Verwandten
Sind treffliche Hofmusikanten!
Die heiligen Stimmen
Ermutern die Sinnen!
Dass Alles für Freuden erwacht.

Whole dishfuls are set out for us.
Good apples, good pears, and good grapes,
And gardeners who allow anything!
If you want venison or hare,
You’ll find them running on the public streets.
Should a fast-day come along,
All the fishes at once come swimming with joy.
There goes Saint Peter, running
With his net and his bait
To the heavenly pond.
Saint Martha shall be the cook.
There is just no music on earth
That can compare to ours.
Even the eleven thousand virgins
Venture to dance,
And Saint Ursula herself has to laugh.
Cecilia and all her relations
Make excellent court musicians.
The angelic voices
Gladden our senses,
So that all awake for joy.

From the folk-poetry anthology *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*