Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Erin Keefe, violin

Thursday, March 15, 2018, 11 am  Orchestra Hall
Friday, March 16, 2018, 8 pm  Orchestra Hall
Saturday, March 17, 2018, 8 pm  Orchestra Hall

This performance is funded in part by the Kurt Weill Foundation for Music, Inc., New York, NY. Turn to page 46 for a message from the Foundation.

Kurt Weill
Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, Opus 12
Andante con moto
Notturno – Cadenza – Serenata
Allegro molto, un poco agitato
Erin Keefe, violin

INTERMISSION
ca. 20’

Gustav Mahler
Symphony No. 1 in D major, Titan
Langsam, schleppend (Slow, dragging)
Kräftig bewegt (With powerful movement)
Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen (Solemn, measured, without dragging)
Stürmisch bewegt (With violent movement)

CD Signing with Osmo Vänskä
Please join us in the lobby following the March 16 and 17 concerts as Music Director Osmo Vänskä signs CDs, including the Minnesota Orchestra’s new album of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony.

Concert Preview with Ryan Webber
Thursday, March 15, 10:15 am, Auditorium
Friday, March 16, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine
Saturday, March 17, 7:15 pm, N. Bud Grossman Mezzanine

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.
**Artists**

**Erin Keefe, violin**

Erin Keefe, the Minnesota Orchestra’s concertmaster since 2011, is a highly-regarded soloist, chamber musician and festival artist. She was featured here as soloist most recently in performances of Mozart’s Sinfonia concertante with violist Matthew Lipman in May 2017. Her other solo performances with the Orchestra have included Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 2, Vaughan Williams’ *The Lark Ascending*, and the Beethoven, Mendelssohn and Brahms Violin Concertos. She has appeared as soloist with orchestras such as the New York City Ballet Orchestra, New Mexico Symphony, Korean Symphony Orchestra, Amadeus Chamber Orchestra, Sendai Philharmonic and Göttingen Symphony Orchestra, among other ensembles. She has been awarded many major distinctions, including the Avery Fisher Career Grant. She has also won the Pro Musica International Award and the Grand Prize in the Valsesia Musica International Violin Competition, Torun International Violin Competition, Schadt Competition and Corpus Christi International String Competition. An active chamber musician, she is an Artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and performs with the Accordo ensemble in Minneapolis. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.

**Osmo Vänskä, conductor**

Profile appears on page 8.

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**one-minute notes**

**Weill: Violin Concerto**

Weill reimagines the concerto as a dialogue between violin and wind band, incorporating Baroque and contemporary influences for a cool 1920s edge. The solo violin is alternately singer and master of fireworks.

**Mahler: Symphony No. 1, Titan**

Mahler's First Symphony opens with evocations of birdsong and nature, then gives way to rhythms of a rustic dance, both vigorous and graceful. Darker themes rise, but so do exquisite melodies (and a wonderful minor-key nod to *Frère Jacques*), as energy builds toward the thrilling conclusion.
Weill composed his Violin Concerto in April and May of 1924. The 24-year-old composer could not have imagined what lay ahead: his ever-troubled but essential marriage, the stunning success of The Threepenny Opera, Hitler, emigration, struggles in Hollywood, and his triumphant reinvention of himself as the American composer of Lady in the Dark, One Touch of Venus and Street Scene.

**A young composer finds his voice**

If I were challenged to come up with a capsule characterization of Weill’s Violin Concerto, I might say “thoroughly and diversely engaging, quirky at times, with touching pages that perhaps take you by surprise.” Yet when the ink was scarcely dry, Weill described it as a “somewhat rough, abstract, completely dissonant piece,” adding for good measure that one needed to have “willingly digested a good portion of Schoenberg” in order to understand the music—an indication of how much Weill was then under the Viennese composer’s spell.

Weill, the son of a cantor, had studied in Berlin with Ferruccio Busoni, from whom he got a rock-solid technical foundation, a sense of artistic integrity and something of his own neo-Classic ideal. His hope had been to work with Schoenberg, but he could not afford the move to Vienna. The young Weill’s technical adroitness and elegance are Schoenbergian, and you can understand why that tough master was eager to take the young man on as a pupil. But I hear no direct musical influence from that source, and the music does not sound in the least like Schoenberg’s. A voice that might come to mind is Paul Hindemith’s. Like many composers of his generation, Weill found Hindemith a stimulating model, and if Weill’s Concerto has a close cousin, the Stimulating model, and if Weill’s Concerto has a close cousin, the

**Concerto for Violin and Wind Orchestra, Opus 12**

Premiered: June 11, 1925

The concerto was premiered on June 11, 1925, in Paris by Marcel Darrieux and the Orchestre des Concerts Walther Straram, with Straram conducting. There are three movements, though I found it interesting, in a way even clarifying, when I read a review of the premiere, in which the writer, the eminent Henri Prunières, described the concerto as a two-movement work with a long intermezzo (actually longer than the two “real” movements).

**The concerto in brief**

Weill begins with a sweetly melancholic duet for clarinets, a few winds and snare drums softly marking the beat beneath. (If you know The Seven Deadly Sins you will recognize the sound.) At the surface level the music becomes faster and faster, finally to subside into the opening clarinet music again, now heard and felt as an epilogue. The violinist alternates in the roles of master of fireworks and of singer. The English writer David Drew, who knows more about Weill than Weill himself did, hears strains of the Gregorian Dies irae in this movement: I myself can barely detect this, but gladly yield to his greater knowledge.

What Prunières heard as an intermezzo is a miniature three-movement suite: Notturno, Cadenza, Serenata. (In making a chain of three more or less standard movement types, is Weill wittily in debt to the tango-waltz-ragtime sequence in Stravinsky’s Soldier’s Tale?) The Notturno, far from a Chopinesque or Debussyan nightscape, approaches the moods of The Threepenny Opera. The trumpet has much to do in the accompanied or at least much punctuated cadenza. The Serenata is rhythmically playful. The blurred borders between the ghostly and the humorous suggest that the spirit of Mahler is not far away. The finale is crisp, brilliant, dancy.

**Instrumentation**: solo violin with orchestra comprising 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), oboe, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, trumpet, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, xylophone and double basses

Not surprisingly, Weill’s choice of instrumentation—the stringless orchestra except for double basses—does much to define the special character of his Violin Concerto. Stravinsky’s Concerto for Piano and Winds comes from 1924 and perhaps helped turn

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Program note by the late Michael Steinberg, used with permission.
Mahler’s First Symphony is one of the most impressive first symphonies ever written, and it gave its young creator a great deal of trouble. He began it late in 1884, when he was only 24, and completed a first version in March 1888. But when it was first performed—to a mystified audience in Budapest on November 20, 1889—it had a form far different from the one we know today. Mahler would not even call it a symphony. For that first performance, when he called it Symphonic Poem, it was in two huge parts: three movements that made up “Days of Youth” and two more for what he called the “Human Comedy.”

Mahler had a love-hate relationship with verbal explanations of his music, denouncing them one moment and releasing new ones the next. As Mahler revised the symphony, he began to let slip quite different hints about the “meaning” of this music. At one point he called it the Titan, borrowing the title of Jean Paul Richter’s novel about a wild young hero who feels lost in this world. He also inserted several themes from his just-completed Songs of a Wayfarer, which are about his recovery from an ill-fated love affair.

But when he finally published this symphony in 1899, he had cut it to four movements, greatly expanded the orchestration, and suppressed all mention of the Titan or any other extra-musical associations. Now it was simply his Symphony No. 1.

**The music: an epic journey**

*langsam, schleppend (slow, dragging).* The very beginning—Mahler asks that it be “like a nature-sound”—is intended to evoke a quiet summer morning, and he captures that hazy, shimmering stillness with a near-silent A six octaves deep. The effect is magical, as if music seems lost, directionless, and now Mahler makes a

**kräftig bewegt (with powerful movement).** The second movement is based on the ländler, the rustic Austrian waltz. Winds and then violins stamp out the opening dance, full of hard edges and stomping accents, and this drives to a powerful cadence. Out of the silence, the sound of a solo horn rivets our attention—and nicely changes the mood. The central section is another ländler, but this one sings beautifully, its flowing melodies made all the more sensual by graceful slides from the violins. The movement concludes with a return of the opening material.

*feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen (solemn, measured, without dragging).* In Mahler’s original Symphonic Poem, this movement opened the second part of the symphony. Deliberately grotesque, this music was inspired by a woodcut picturing the funeral of a hunter, whose body is borne through the woods by forest animals—deer, foxes, rabbits, shrews, birds—celebrating his death with mock pageantry. Over the timpani’s quiet tread, solo bass violin plays a lugubrious little tune that is treated as a round, a minor-key variation of the children’s song Frère Jacques.

The first episode lurches along sleazily over an oom-pah rhythm; Mahler indicates that he wants this played “with parody,” and the music echoes the klezmer street bands of Eastern Europe. But a further episode brings soft relief: muted violins offer another quotation from the Wayfarer songs, this time a theme that had set the words “By the wayside stands a linden tree, and there at last I’ve found some peace.” In the song cycle, these words marked the disappointed lover’s escape from his pain and his return to life. The march returns, and the timpani taps this movement to its nearly silent close.

**stürmisch bewegt (with violent movement).** Mahler said of this violent music: “the [last] movement then springs suddenly, like lightning from a dark cloud. It is simply the cry of a deeply wounded heart, preceded by the ghastly brooding oppressiveness of the funeral march.” Mahler’s original title for this movement was “From Inferno to Paradise,” and this description does reflect the progress of the finale, which moves from the seething tumult of its beginning to the triumph of the close.

Longest by far of the movements, the finale is based on two main themes: a fierce, stirring figure in the winds near the beginning and a gorgeous, long-lined melody for violins shortly afterwards. The development pitches between extremes of mood as it drives to what seems a climax but is in fact a false conclusion. The music seems lost, directionless, and now Mahler makes a


wonderful decision: back comes the dreamy, slow music from the symphony’s very beginning. Slowly this gathers energy, and what had been gentle at the beginning now returns in glory, shouted out by seven horns as the symphony smashes home triumphantly in D major, racing to the two whip-cracks that bring it to a thrilling conclusion.

conflicting signals

What are we to make of Mahler’s many conflicting signals as to what this symphony is “about”? Is it about youth and the “human comedy”? Is it autobiographical, the tale of his recovery from an unhappy love affair?

Late in his brief life, when he conducted this work with the New York Philharmonic in 1909, Mahler suggested yet another reading. He wrote to his disciple Bruno Walter that he was “quite satisfied with this youthful sketch….What a world this is that casts up such reflections of sounds and figures! Things like the Funeral March and the bursting of the storm which follows it seem to me a flaming indictment of the Creator.”

In the end, we must throw up our hands in the face of so much contradictory information. Perhaps it is best just to settle back and listen to Mahler’s First Symphony for itself—and the mighty symphonic journey that it is.

**Instrumentation:** 4 flutes (3 doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 4 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet and E-flat clarinet, 1 doubling E-flat clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 7 horns, 5 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, harp and strings

Program note by [Eric Bromberger](#).

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The Minnesota Orchestra first performed Weill’s Violin Concerto on July 20, 2000, at Orchestra Hall, with Marc-André Dalbavie conducting and Dmitry Sitkovetsky as soloist. Until this week, the Orchestra’s only other performances of the work came in May 2007, when former Minnesota Orchestra Concertmaster Jorja Fleezanis played it under the baton of Edo de Waart, the former Music Director who appointed her to the concertmaster position in 1989.

The Orchestra gave its initial performance of Mahler’s First Symphony on January 28, 1938, at Northrop Memorial Auditorium, with Dimitri Mitropoulos on the conductor’s podium. This symphony is sometimes performed with an additional movement titled Blumine (Flower-Piece), inserted after the first movement. Blumine was performed here most recently in April 2008, with Osmo Vänskä conducting.

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This month the Minnesota Orchestra is releasing the second album in its Grammy-nominated Mahler symphonies series, featuring the Sixth Symphony. Pick up your copy starting March 12 at the Orchestra Hall box office—and join Music Director Osmo Vänskä in the lobby following the March 16 and 17 concerts as he signs copies of the new album. Discs will also be available at minnesotaorchestra.org.