

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Friday, November 2, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
 Saturday, November 3, 2018, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Gustav Mahler

Symphony No. 7 in E minor

ca. 84'

Langsam – Allegro risoluto

Nachtmusik: Andante molto moderato

Scherzo: Schattenhaft

Nachtmusik: Andante amoroso

Rondo – Finale: Allegro ordinario – Allegro moderato ma energico

This program is performed without intermission.

CD signing: Join us in the lobby after the November 2 and 3 concerts as Osmo Vänskä will sign the Orchestra's Mahler symphony CDs.

OH+

Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley and Akiko Fujimoto
 Friday, November 2, 7 pm and 7:25 pm, Target Atrium
 Saturday, November 3, 7 pm and 7:25 pm, Target Atrium

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.





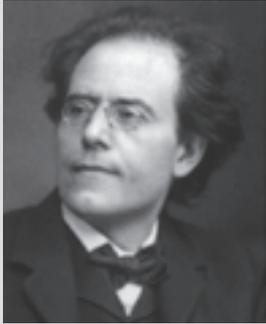
Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 6.

one-minute note

Mahler: Symphony No. 7

Mahler’s Seventh—an epic voyage from night to day—sustains an intensity of expression across five virtuoso movements. The massive opening depicts a violent, stubborn force, while the following three movements offer more hopeful faces of the night, including a flickering scherzo and a moonlit serenade. The grandiose finale is a stunning daybreak, delivering a rush of incandescent energy and overflowing with melodic ideas.



Gustav Mahler
Born: July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia
Died: May 18, 1911, Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 7 in E minor
Premiered: September 19, 1908

The Seventh has always been the neglected stepsister among Mahler’s ten symphonies, and greater familiarity over the last several decades has not yet transformed it into Cinderella.

a curious beginning

Mahler’s Seventh had the strangest creation of any of his ten symphonies. In the summer of 1904, he brought his family to their summer retreat at Maiernigg, on the southern shore of the Wörthersee in central Austria. That summer, Mahler composed some of his darkest music, the finale of the Sixth Symphony, then pressed on to write two quite different movements. Both were brief, both were relaxed, and Mahler referred to them as *Nachtmusik* movements: “night-music.” But he had no idea how they might fit into a larger symphonic context.

Mahler returned to Maiernigg in the summer of 1905, still with no idea how to proceed. A trip to the Dolomites mountain range in Italy brought no inspiration, and, dejected, he headed back home. He got into a boat to be rowed across to Maiernigg, and “As soon as the oar touched the water the theme (or rather the rhythm and the feeling) of the introduction to the first movement came to me—and in four weeks the first, third and fifth movements were ready and done with!” Mahler led the premiere of the Seventh Symphony on September 19, 1908, in Prague.

darkness and light

Mahler claimed to be wary of providing programs for his symphonies, yet he left a wealth of hints about the Seventh. It is, he said, about the progress from night to day. A massive opening movement, which depicts what he called “the power of darkness... [night as a] violent, stubborn, brutal and tyrannical force,” is followed by three briefer movements, two titled *Nachtmusik* and a central scherzo, that offer different responses to night. The finale, which Mahler nicknamed *Der Tag* (Day), escapes the darkness and thrusts us into bright C-major sunlight.

langsam-allegro risoluto. Mahler described the opening movement as “tragic night” and even went so far as to say that it is “dominated by a tragic and elemental power, that of Death.” It opens quietly with the pulsing rhythm inspired by the oars, and

over this intrudes the strange sound of the tenor horn. Mahler, who asks that this passage be played with *großer Ton* (big sound), referred to this beginning as the sound of “nature roaring.” Gradually the music eases ahead and becomes a march, and this in turn accelerates into the main body of the movement. A spectacular collection of night-sounds—shrieks, whistles, trills—accompanies the rush into the main theme, a mighty horn-call marked *Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo*. To the conductor Willem Mengelberg, Mahler described this theme as the force that would do battle against the forces of the night. The second subject is one of the most beautiful melodies Mahler ever wrote, a soaring theme for violins that he marks *Mit großem Schwung*: “With great energy, verve.”

During one interlude of the development, the music grows quiet and solemn, and a harp glissando sweeps us into a moment that can only be described as magic: Mahler stacks up all four of his main themes—the opening oar rhythm, the march, the main horn theme, and the violins’ soaring second subject—and presents them simultaneously. It is a moment fully worthy of those other towering examples of symphonic counterpoint, the finales of Mozart’s *Jupiter* and Bruckner’s Eighth. The wonder is that instead of sounding chaotic or forced, this episode sounds so luminous and beautiful. Mahler builds to a climax he marks *Grandioso*, and the march propels the movement to its firm close. Mahler may have believed this movement full of night and death, but it ends in a triumph that appears to have dispelled the forces of darkness.

The three interior movements, all much shorter, offer less ominous faces of the night.

nachtmusik: andante molto moderato. Mahler said that the second movement was inspired by Rembrandt’s painting *The Night Watch* and felt that this particular patrol was moving through what he called “fantastic semi-darkness.” Listeners should not search for a literal depiction of a patrol at night but instead for the sense of moving through darkness. The opening horn call and its distant answer create a sense of space, and Mahler heightens this with periodic use of quiet cowbells, heard from afar.

scherzo: schattenhaft. The central scherzo is marked *Schattenhaft* (shadowy), and it rushes past like something flickering through the darkness. Much of the writing is in the depths of the orchestra (full of whirring, thumping sounds from low strings, tuba, timpani), and the music keeps breaking into ghostly little waltzes, fun rather than frightening, and the movement ends with a wry joke.

nachtmusik: andante amoroso. Mahler’s marking for the fourth movement, *Andante amoroso*, reminds us that night is also the time of love. This is a moonlit serenade, its character underlined by guitar and mandolin, and much of it written for solo violin, another instrument associated with the music of love. Night here is warm and perfumed, and this sensual music is scored with delicacy. Cellos and violins sing in the central episode, and the movement closes on the guitar’s softly-strummed chords.

rondo-finale: allegro ordinario-allegro moderato ma energico. All this delicacy vanishes in the first instant of the finale, which opens with timpani salvos, wild horn trills and a trumpet solo that rips into the stratosphere. We have left behind night, and are now in the full light of day. This brilliant finale overflows with incandescent energy. It is also full of quotations from other music, and if the main theme seems to take the shape of another piece of celebration music—Wagner’s Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*—what are we to make of the other references? Some have heard a touch of Lehár’s *Merry Widow* here, others a bit of Mendelssohn there, and there is even a whiff of Rimsky’s *Russian Easter Overture* along the way. More unsettling are the movement’s constant dislocations. This music hurtles through instantaneous changes of key, tempo and mood, and while this has been described as a kaleidoscopic inclusiveness, sometimes it feels as if Mahler is shifting gears without benefit of a clutch. Episodic as this music may be, Mahler provides a degree of balance by bringing back the main theme of the opening movement as he nears the conclusion. It is a measure of the suddenness of his vision in the rowboat that the finale—which he wrote first—returns to the main theme of a movement written after it was complete. First we hear bits of it, and finally the full theme is shouted out in all its glory, as the symphony hurtles to its close.

The Seventh Symphony is the most fantastic music (in the literal sense of that adjective) that Mahler ever wrote. This long night’s journey into day is a dazzling passage: the three middle movements have considerable charm, and there is much to love in that strange, dark first movement. But more than anything else it is the finale, the destination point of that journey, that has proven the thorniest part of the work. Listeners come out of this finale (and so out of the entire symphony) amazed, fascinated, dizzied—and challenged to make full sense of this extraordinary symphonic journey.

a note on this edition

Mahler’s Seventh, which has had the most difficult publishing history of any of his symphonies, is heard in these concerts in a new critical edition by Reinhold Kubik and published in 2008 by the International Mahler Gesellschaft, with final revisions in 2011. The 1909 score, published by Bote and Bock of Berlin, contained more than 700 errors, the result of poor editing and use of differing



sources. The Erwin Ratz edition of 1960 solved some but not all of the problems; the Hans Redlich version two years later was based on material from different performances by Mahler himself, so confusions about which text is accurate have persisted. In the Kubik edition, remaining errors and inconsistencies have been corrected—and the score and parts now agree with each other. Listeners will not hear glaring differences between the Kubik and Ratz versions, but for the performers, this edition solves many of the problems that have plagued this complex work over the past century.

Instrumentation: 4 flutes, piccolo (1 flute also doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tenor horn, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, cowbells, rute, tambourine, tamtam, triangle, keyboard glockenspiel, chimes, 2 harps, mandolin, guitar and strings

Program note by *Eric Bromberger*.



Mahler and the Minnesota Orchestra

The Minnesota Orchestra and Music Director Osmo Vänskä are the midst of recording Mahler’s ten symphonies on the BIS Records label, with two discs—the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies—released thus far, and the Second Symphony album due out later this season. Visit the Orchestra Hall Box Office or minnesotaorchestra.org to add to your recording collection, and join us in the lobby following the November 2 and 3 concerts as Osmo Vänskä signs the Fifth and Sixth Symphony albums.

Mahler’s Symphony No. 5

“With an opening trumpet fanfare of great depth and fearsome might, you know you’re in for a performance full of drama and character...Vänskä’s more controlled approach pays enormous dividends at the climaxes, again helped hugely by fantastic brass....The real triumph is the central Scherzo, with a satisfying robustness to the sound of the horns.”

– *Presto Classical*, July 2017

“If you go out and buy the Minnesota Orchestra’s BIS recording of Mahler’s fifth symphony, rest assured that you need never buy

another. It’s resoundingly well played in every department, devoid of the bravado that impairs some American performances, and discreetly shaped by the music director Osmo Vänskä.”

– Norman Lebrecht, *Musical Toronto*, July 2017

“...the orchestral playing is exceptional throughout.”

– Andrew Clements, *The Guardian*, July 13, 2017

“Vänskä’s astute musicality and his aversion to histrionics makes for a highly satisfying listen. It also builds anticipation for future releases in the orchestra’s exciting new Mahler series.”

– Terry Blain, *Star Tribune*, August 4, 2017

Mahler’s Symphony No. 6

“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

“The Finnish maestro opts for the revised order of middle movements, the searing andante preceding the scherzo, with its ‘old fatherly,’ Ländler-like trio. The Minnesotans shine in the eerie sonorities of the finale, building to another allegro energico, but ending, movingly, in the minor tonality.”

– Hugh Canning, *The Sunday Times*, May 13, 2018

“Vänskä and the orchestra are among the finest exponents of Mahler’s music and their performances are competitive with the best recordings, past and present. The interpretation here is intensely focused and utterly compelling, and the playing is impassioned and unnervingly vivid....the integrity of the performance and the expressive heights that are achieved carry the day and make Vänskä’s recording essential for Mahler buffs.”

– Blair Sanderson, *AllMusic Review*

“By keeping a firm grip on the first three movements, Osmo Vänskä ensures that the vast and increasingly frantic finale, with its hammer-blows of Fate, really does come over as climactic, culminating in a last A minor blast and fade of annihilating intensity....The work’s opening is crisp and disciplined rather than lumpen....A welcome and convincing reappraisal of a difficult, not to say extreme score.”

– *BBC Music Magazine*, June 14, 2018

Mahler’s Symphony No. 2, Resurrection

Recording due out later this season—watch future issues of Showcase magazine and minnesotaorchestra.org for details.