

MAHLER

in miniature



Presented by

MAHLER PLAYERS

DEBUSSY Syrinx
BOULEZ Mémoriale
EVANS Hildegard of Bingen Variations
MAHLER Symphony No. 5 (arr. Simon)

Catherine O'Rourke flute
Tomas Leakey conductor

Ardross Nairn Inverness
4th 6th 7th November 2015



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Welcome to this evening's performance, the fifth programme in the Mahler Players' long-term concert series *Mahler in Miniature*.

In the short first half we perform *Mémoriale*, to celebrate the 90th birthday year of Pierre Boulez, arguably the greatest composer-conductor since Mahler himself. Debussy's *Syrinx* has been chosen as the foil for the Boulez. Though they did not have very much contact, Debussy and Mahler were exact contemporaries and were both great influences on Boulez. To emphasise their connection, the Debussy and Boulez will be performed together without pause. It will then be a huge pleasure to perform a brand new work, *Variations on a Theme of Hildegard of Bingen*, by our principal horn player, Andy Evans.

The 5th Symphony of Gustav Mahler is an inspired creation. One of the most contemporary and timeless of his works, it is summed up well by his major biographer:

In the 5th Symphony, Mahler surpasses himself in instinctively assuming the uncertainty, the doubts, the secret anguish, the fundamental ambiguity that marked his time and still weighs so heavily on ours. Henry-Louis la Grange, 1983

We would like to extend a special welcome to our Patron, Sir Brian McMaster, and also all those who have supported us, in a big or a small way, to make these concerts possible. The concerts could not have happened without support from the National Lottery through Creative Scotland, the Hugh Fraser Foundation and Scott-Moncrieff Business Advisors and Accountants as well as several generous individuals. Your continuing support is invaluable.

PROGRAMME

Claude Debussy: *Syrinx*

Pierre Boulez: *Mémoriale (...explosante-fixe...Original)*

Andy Evans: *Variations on a Theme of Hildegard of Bingen (New Commission)*

Interval

Gustav Mahler: *Symphony No. 5 (arr. Simon)*

Part I

1. Trauermarsch: In gemessenem Schritt. Streng. Wie ein Kondukt
2. Stürmisch bewegt: Mit größter Vehemenz

Part II

3. Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

Part III

4. Adagietto: Sehr langsam
5. Rondo-Finale: Allegro giocoso. Frisch

Catherine O'Rourke flute
Tomas Leakey conductor

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862 – 1918) *Syrinx* (1913) L. 129

Inspired by the works of Baudelaire and enjoying close links with Mallarmé, Verlaine, Louys and Mourey, Debussy shared common ground in the overarching aesthetic of symbolism. A closer look at his engagement with the movement reveals that he was drawn, on more than one occasion, to the poetic/literary presentation of Greek Legend which he went on to recreate in musical form. Examples include Mallarmé's poem *Afternoon of a Faun* and Louys' *Chanson de Bilitis*. Both works predate *Syrinx* and both make reference to Pan, the Arcadian God of shepherds and flocks.

A curious figure, Pan could be helpful and productive or, when the direction of his mood drifted elsewhere, destructive, bringing "panic" into the lives of those around him. *Syrinx*, for solo flute, was written as incidental music to Gabriel Mourey's play, *Psyche*. In his composition, Debussy invites the capricious character and his music to dominate the narrative.

According to one version of the Greek Legend, *Syrinx*, a beautiful wood nymph, is being pursued by the amorous Pan and, in a bid to escape from his advances, takes refuge in the River Loddon. Pleading to the gods for help, she is turned into a water reed and evades him for the last time. Pan, unable to find her, attempts to reach *Syrinx* through music, the one gift of beauty he can legitimately claim to own. Plucking the very reed into which she has been transformed, he creates his Pan Flute otherwise known as Pan Pipes or *Syrinx* which will, for ever, sing with her spirit.

Mourey requested that the piece be played just before Pan's death - more than a little poignant given the rejection he suffered soon after birth when his mother recoiled from his half-man, half-goat form.

Originally given the title *La Flute de Pan* with the focus being on Pan, his flute and his music, the piece was renamed *Syrinx* in 1927, nine years after Debussy's death. It has been suggested that his publisher, Jobert, did so to avoid confusion with a movement from *Chanson de Bilitis* which shared the same heading.

Programme note by Catherine O'Rourke

PIERRE BOULEZ (b. 1925) *Mémoriale (...explosante-fixe...Original)*

Pierre Boulez is unquestionably one of the most significant musical minds of the second half of the 20th and the 21st Century. As a composer his influence is enormous, despite his relatively small output. He is arguably the greatest living conductor, having recorded everything from Wagner's Ring Cycle to the works of Schoenberg, Webern, Berg, Bartók and Stravinsky and brought great clarity to some works previously thought unplayable. This is not to mention his complete Mahler cycle and his tenures in the 1970s as the principle conductor of both the BBC Symphony and New York Philharmonic Orchestras. He has also written voluminously, including controversial polemics in his early years such as the infamous 1951 article 'Schoenberg is Dead', denouncing the recently deceased composer for his traditionalism, of all things.

Mémoriale went through a long stage of evolution before reaching the version which we hear today. The initial idea was a piece called *explosante-fixe*, conceived as a tribute to Stravinsky after his death in 1971, and based on a tone-row entitled 'Originel', centered around the note Eb ('Eb' being called 'S' in German). *Explosante-fixe* was eventually (the premiere was in 1993) developed into a forty minute work for three flutes, chamber orchestra and electronics. In the meantime Boulez had used the 'Originel' material to produce other works, including the present *Mémoriale*, which was first performed in 1985.

The flute part was written in its entirety several years before the accompanying instruments were added. As Jonathan Goldman (2011) has pointed out, the texture of *Mémoriale* is "that of a single instrument provided with a supporting ensemble whose role is to prolong, extend, harmonise and reiterate ideas introduced in the solo part". The accompanying ensemble is thus more similar to an 'unplugged' live electronic resource than a traditional accompaniment. This 'electronic' accompaniment does such things as 'picking up' notes played by the flute and sustaining them - a resonator. It also makes use of echo effects.

In a lecture given in 1991, Boulez revealed that the accompanying instruments were chosen to create a continuum between a "straight" sonority (i.e. clean, focused, non-vibrato) on the one hand and a "fuzzy" one (involving blurring or muffling effects such as vibrato, tremolo, muting and flutter-tonguing) on the other. The extreme points on this continuum are given by the horns at one end with their very clean and focused sound, and the flute, which is often instructed to play with trills and flutter-tonguing, at the other. The strings bridge the gap, sometimes being directed to play 'non-vibrato, ordinario' and at other times with effects such as tremolo, sul tasto and sul ponticello (bowing on the fingerboard and near the bridge).

The piece contains four different 'elements' of music, each with their own tempo and unique figuration in the flute part, which recur throughout. The most distinctive is a slow trilled section where the flute plays the notes of the 'Originel' tone-row, adding one extra note each time the section reappears before eventually presenting the full row at the final occurrence. Each of these sections end on a unison Eb, representing Stravinsky.

The technical accomplishment of this work is extraordinary. However, it has a simplicity, beauty and haunting quality too, which is what should come across most clearly in performance. When interviewed about his music in 2012, Boulez agreed that beauty was always something he strove for but added: "sometimes it is difficult to go to this kind of beauty, which is different from other beauties, but I want the music to bring you into a sphere where you don't go generally". For those prepared to open their ears, Boulez's music can do just that, transporting the listener to a fascinating world of beauty, fantasy and possibility.

Programme note by Tomas Leakey

ANDY EVANS (b. 1961) *Variations on a Theme of Hildegard of Bingen* (New Commission)

A few years ago I bought a CD of music by Hildegard of Bingen as I had heard a Hildegard piece I enjoyed on Radio 3. I was fascinated by the beauty, spirituality and simplicity of the music. That it was written by a woman almost 1000 years ago made it even more interesting. The piece I have based these variations on, *O Euchari in leta via*, was the track

I kept returning to over and over again. At first I thought about using the theme for a violin concerto but eventually I settled on a set of variations.

The theme is stated by a solo viola followed by other combinations with a sparse harmonic accompaniment. This runs into the first variation which uses harmonic lines parallel to the theme at varying intervals with an off-beat motif based on the tonic in the winds. A fast, strident variation in 5/8 follows where the theme is rhythmically transformed, mainly for the winds with a shifting, harmony based, rising accompaniment in the strings. There is a central more gentle section with warmer harmonisation and answering motifs.

The central variation uses the theme as a bass line above which is a poly-chordal, intense chorale-like theme stated first by the strings and then by the wind with a descant on trumpet. A more restrained central section uses moving quavers on violin and then flute based on the chorale chords with a new tune on top.

The next fast variation again uses the theme as a bass line which now has a syncopated dance like feel. On top is a light-hearted version of the theme with sudden dynamic and rhythmical contrasts. In the last variation, which has a dreamy, romantic feel, the theme based on a modal tonic of E has an accompaniment in C major giving the theme a completely different mood. I was initially quite pleased with this device till my brother pointed out that Schubert does exactly the same in one of his piano sonatas!

The work finishes with a return to a modal key of E and the final chords are meant to portray the uncertainty of spirituality in our modern world. I would like to thank the Mahler Players for asking me to write this work for them. I hope you enjoy listening to it as much as I have enjoyed writing it.

Programme note by Andy Evans

GUSTAV MAHLER (1861 – 1911) Symphony No. 5 (arr. Simon)

The 5th Symphony was composed in the summers of 1901 and 1902 in Mahler's holiday home at Maiernigg on the Wörthersee in Switzerland. The summer holidays are generally accepted as the time when Mahler did most of his composition; his 'day-job' as Musical Director of the Vienna State Opera (1897 – 1907) was too busy to allow for creative work during the concert season.

Whilst it can be unwise to link a composer's music too closely to events in their lives, there are two major events that happened in Mahler's life during this period worthy of consideration. Firstly there was his near-death experience in February 1901 when he almost succumbed to a haemorrhage, probably brought on by overwork. Secondly there was his very rapid meeting, engagement and marriage to Alma Schindler, 18 years his junior. They met for the first time in November 1901 and were married in March the following year. Whilst it may seem facile, a preoccupation with death on the one hand and love on the other characterise the 5th Symphony well.

The first performance was in October 1904 in Cologne with the Gürzenich Orchestra and Mahler conducting. It was not a great success and afterwards Mahler commented: "Nobody understood it. I wish I could conduct the first performance fifty years after my death". Mahler continued to revise the score (mainly its orchestration) for the rest of his life – and

in fact the final revision of the 5th symphony was one of his last acts as a composer before his final illness, as shown by his letter to Georg Göhler in February 1911:

I have finished my Fifth – it had to be almost completely re-orchestrated. I simply can't understand why I still had to make such mistakes, like the merest beginner. It is clear that all the experience I had gained in writing the first four symphonies completely let me down in this one – for a completely new style demanded a new technique.

The Symphony is formed of three 'parts': the first comprising movements 1 and 2, the second the *Scherzo* and the third the *Adagietto* and *Finale*. The tonality is progressive, beginning in C# Minor and ending in D major. Symphonies 5 – 7 are often considered Mahler's most conventional, mainly because they dispense with the human voice which was integral to symphonies No. 1 – 4 (n.b. while the voice doesn't actually appear in Symphony No. 1, much of the material is taken directly from earlier song settings). But, as we shall see, the influence of his song writing and thinking is still very much present.

The first movement opens with the famous trumpet solo – unavoidably reminiscent of Beethoven's 5th Symphony - which begins the first of two alternating funeral marches: one epic in scale and the second more private. Interspersed with these marches, the second of which is reminiscent of the world of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, in particular the 1901 song *Der Tamboursg'sell* ("The Drummer Boy"), are two contrasting sections which, curiously, are referred to by most commentators as 'trios'. Curiously because the first is a violent explosion in Bb minor and the second a slower but agitated section which builds up to the delirium-like climax of the whole movement – not what 'trios' traditionally do. The transitions between sections are articulated by the return of the trumpet fanfare each time. The second movement, in A minor and entitled 'Hauptsatz' ('principal movement') in the manuscript, is in some ways an extended development of the first, with many of the themes and motifs of the funeral march returning, though always in a different way. One of Mahler's most telling comments (to his long-term confidant the violist Natalie Bauer-Lechner) whilst working on the 5th Symphony was: "There shall be no repetition, but only evolution". This movement embodies an enormous sense of struggle and near the end, a rising motif which has been present since the second 'trio' of the funeral march finally 'succeeds' after several attempts and a glorious chorale in D major bursts forth. The triumph does not last for long though and the chorale is brutally cut off by a return of the opening material, after which follows a stormy coda. The movement ends in utter despair.

Commentators including Deryck Cooke have remarked on the 'dangerous disparity' of Mahler's 5th and, with the opening of the *Scherzo*, it is easy to see why. The preoccupation with death appears completely gone and out comes a powerful and humorous stylised Austrian waltz, announced by the tutti horns and with an important obbligato part for the principal horn throughout. Mahler said of the *Scherzo* that it represented "man in the full light of day, having reached the peak of his existence" and also "Every note is charged with life, and the whole thing whirls round in a giddy dance". This is indeed true, though the movement contains moments of hesitation, tenderness and sorrow too, particularly in the 'recitativo' dialogues between the solo horn and the lower strings. The varied return of the opening section towards the end is a frenzied 'Strauss waltz' which unmasks the decadent exuberance of *Fin de siècle* Vienna in a way absolutely equal to a piece more famous for the same thing - Ravel's *La Valse*.

Part 3 brings us to what is probably the best known of all Mahler's works, the *Adagietto*. Scored for only strings and harp (with two clarinets added to fill out the harmony in the chamber version) it has become famous as a piece in its own right, largely through its use in Visconti's 1971 film *Death in Venice*. It has had its detractors; after a 1905 performance of the symphony under Nikisch in Berlin, Richard Strauss, with characteristic dryness, wrote to Mahler: "Your symphony again gave me great pleasure in the full rehearsal, a pleasure only slightly dimmed by the little *Adagietto*. But as this was what pleased the audience most, you are getting what you deserve." The *Adagietto* has a very interesting performance history and huge discrepancies in the tempi taken by different conductors: the slowest recorded performance is literally half the tempo of the fastest. It is often argued that the work was Mahler's 'declaration of love' to Alma, and as such can be interpreted as a 'song without words' – in the manner perhaps of one of the Rückert settings which were written in the same period. Such an interpretation – where the line has to be 'singable' – would relieve the movement of some of the valedictory lugubriousness that it has acquired through its association with the film and performance traditions.

The *Finale*, which follows the *Adagietto* without pause is a remarkably joyous conclusion – there is not a single section in the minor. It is also perhaps the clearest indicator in the symphony of Mahler's exposure to the music of Bach and also of the sheer joy in life he felt in the summer of 1902, shortly after his marriage and with life going very well (a state of affairs which, sadly, was not to last for long). The movement neatly illustrates a general statement that Mahler made about composition at this time: "The task of contemporary creative musicians is to combine the contrapuntal skill of Bach with the melodiousness of Haydn and Mozart". The *Finales* of Haydn's 'Drumroll' and 'London' Symphony certainly come to mind. The work ends with the return of the chorale from the second movement, this time in a triumphant conclusion. Some commentators have suggested that the *Finale* is the weak point of the work, representing the kind of strained, inauthentic 'triumphalism' that we encounter in the works of later composers such as Shostakovich. This seems a rather churlish reaction to an expression of joy in life from one of the most multi-faceted composers who has ever lived.

The chamber arrangement being performed this evening is by the German composer, pianist and musicologist Klaus Simon, who has also produced chamber arrangements of the 1st, 4th and 9th symphonies. The string and principal wind and brass parts are virtually unchanged from the original symphony and the extra harmony parts are provided on the harmonium and piano. The heavy brass is divided between these instruments and the horns, who thereby take on an even bigger role than they have in the original symphony.

Programme note by Tomas Leakey



CATHERINE O'ROURKE – flute

Catherine graduated from Aberdeen University with an Honours Degree in English Literature and Language and Moray House in Edinburgh with a PGTC in English and History. Since then, she has gained Diplomas in both Flute Teaching and Performance.

After raising her three children, she made a side-ways career shift into music and now enjoys a very active schedule teaching and performing.

During the Academic Year, Catherine travels from her home in Inverness to spend part of the week in Aberdeen where she tutors flute and history of music. Moving between the North East of

Scotland Music School, Aberdeen University and Aberdeen City Music School, she also directs a number of flute ensembles.

Catherine is principal flute with the Highland Chamber Orchestra and regularly plays with the Inverness Sinfonia and Moray-based Culbin Singers. She is also flute player with the Merlewood Ensemble; the Mahler Players; Mahler Wind Quintet and Layla Wind Quintet.

When time and inspiration are given the space to conspire, she turns her attention to writing poetry and short stories. "Across The Albans," a set of 4 Celtic Fire Festival poems, was set to music for chamber orchestra, soprano and tenor by composer, Helen Goodwill. This work was recently performed at Eden Court Theatre in Inverness.



ANDY EVANS - composer

Andy, like many doctors, was torn between medicine and music as a career when a teenager. He was then a clarinettist but as a junior doctor he took up the horn. He is currently principle horn of the Dundee and Perth Symphony Orchestras and also plays with a number of chamber ensembles.

Andy has composed classical music for the last 15 years. He won the iCompose competition and consequently had "Danse" performed and recorded by members of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. Andy was a prize winner in a BBC competition and as a result his work "and Mary said" was recorded by the Henschel Quartet and the Tölzer Knabenchor from Munich for Neos records. Recently an orchestral work "the joy of small things" has been performed by the Highland Chamber Orchestra and the Dundee Symphony Orchestra. A companion piece to Mozart's Gran Partita, "suite for thirteen winds" is published by Spartan Press.

Andy currently works at Dundee University as an academic breast radiologist.

TOMAS LEAKEY – conductor

Tomas Leakey began his musical life as a trombonist in the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra. He later joined the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland, playing under such conductors as Vernon Handley and Christopher Adey. At the University of Cambridge he studied Natural Sciences but was also very active on the music scene as a pianist and trombonist where he played in all the main orchestras and ensembles. In his third year he took up conducting and was the director of Christ's College Orchestra.

Tomas studied conducting with the late George Hurst at the Sherborne (formerly Canford) Summer School of Music and from 2012 – 2013 he studied conducting with Denise Ham at

the Blackheath Conservatoire in London. In the summers of 2012 and 2013 he was one of the student conductors at Aberystwyth Musicfest, working with Toby Purser and the Orion Orchestra. Tomas has also studied privately with Susan Dingle and, most recently, with Adrian Brown. In March 2013 he set up and conducted an educational project in the Highlands, in which a full performance of Stravinsky's *The Soldier's Tale* was taken to several local schools. In June 2013 he founded an ensemble, The Mahler Players, for three performances of Mahler's Symphony No. 4. The project, *Mahler in Miniature*, has continued and is now presenting its 5th set of concerts. Tomas was also responsible for leading the Mahler Players through a second educational project in autumn 2015, featuring William Walton's *Façade*.

Tomas was the organ scholar at Inverness Cathedral for a year from September 2012 to September 2013. As well as learning the rudiments of the organ and singing bass, he gained his first experiences of choral conducting.

Described by reviewers as 'a highly capable musician, and a talent to watch', Tomas continues to play the trombone and piano in addition to his conducting and is currently undertaking study in solo playing and accompaniment with the pianist Eugene Asti.



THE MAHLER PLAYERS

1ST VIOLINS:

Eleanor Cameron (leader),
Francis Moore-Colyer

2nd VIOLINS:

David Murray, Hazel Younger

VIOLAS:

Jonathan Rutter, Rachel Farmer

CELLOS:

Rick Lusher, Natalie Kilgallen

DOUBLE BASS:

Rick Standley (Ardross),
Chris Sergeant (Nairn and Inverness)

FLUTE/PICCOLO:

Catherine O'Rourke

OBOE/COR ANGLAIS

Leslie Callander

CLARINET, BASS/Eb CLARINET

Mhairi Callander, James Ross

BASSOON:

Bruce Gordon

HORNS:

Andy Evans, Rob Farmer, Morag
Redwood

TRUMPET:

Jack Ross

PERCUSSION/TIMPANI

Alison Russell, Clair Munro (Ardross),
Scott Nairn (Nairn and Inverness)

HARP:

Erica Sinclair

PIANO:

Fiona Sellar

HARMONIUM:

Gordon Tocher

We hope you enjoyed this evening's performance. We would be grateful if you can fill in the questionnaire, which will give you the chance to enter a prize draw for free tickets to future concerts. Please leave the questionnaire by the door where you picked up tickets as you leave or alternatively post it to us (address opposite) at a later date.

The Mahler Players have exciting plans for 2016 and 2017 including performances of the 9th and 10th Symphonies and *Das Lied von der Erde*. The average cost of a Mahler Players concert series is well above what we raise through ticket sales (in June 2015 the ratio of other income to ticket sales was 4:1), so in order to bring these projects to fruition we need your support. There are two main ways you can help.

Donating: If you would like to support us financially you can donate online through our Just-Giving page which can be accessed via our website: www.mahlerplayers.co.uk. Alternatively you can send a cheque, payable to 'Mahler Players' to the address opposite. If you are a UK tax-payer you can boost the donation by 25% by filling in the Gift Aid form opposite. There will also be opportunities to make a cash donation at this evening's concert if you wish.

Bring your friends! The bigger the audience we get the smaller the shortfall that we have to raise by other means, so if you like what we do why not share it with others?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- The National Lottery through Creative Scotland
- The Hugh Fraser Foundation
- Scott-Moncrieff Business Advisors and Accountants
- Highland Council

CONTACT US

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DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

Inverness Choral Society

Saturday 21st November, Eden Court, 7.30pm

Fanshawe African Sanctus

Ramirez Misa Criola

Backbeat Percussion Quartet

Maureen Brathwaite - soprano

Gordon Tocher - conductor

Highland Young Musicians

Saturday 21st November, Macdonald Highland Resort, Aviemore

Music from 2.30pm. For more information visit www.highland-young-musicians.com



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