

MAHLER

in miniature



Presented by

MAHLER PLAYERS 

MAHLER SYMPHONY NO. 9

Ardross, Nairn, Inverness, Perth
21, 23, 24, 26 September 2016

Welcome to today's concert.

In the penultimate tour of the *Mahler in Miniature* series, we approach one of the pinnacles of the repertoire. It has been an ambition of ours to perform the 9th Symphony ever since the orchestra was formed three years ago and so this week is very significant for us all. We hope it is as special for you, our audience.

As well as returning to three fantastic venues in the Highlands, we are excited to be making our debut in Perth Concert Hall and hope therefore to be playing for many people who are hearing us for the first time. We would like to extend a special welcome to our Patron, Sir Brian McMaster, to our regular audience and to all those who have supported us, in a big or a small way, to make these concerts possible.

PROGRAMME

Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 9 (arr. Simon)

- I. Andante comodo
- II. Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers
- III. Rondo-Burleske
- IV. Adagio

Tomas Leakey conductor

**** Please note there will be no interval in this concert ****

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860 – 1911) Symphony No. 9 (arr. Simon)

Ever since its posthumous premiere in 1912, the 9th Symphony of Mahler, like the 9ths of Beethoven and Bruckner, has acquired an almost mythical status. It has been described by some as Mahler's 'Farewell' to the world, perhaps most influentially by Leonard Bernstein. Despite the problems with this view – Mahler's health was good when he wrote the symphony, he had ambitious plans for the future and he got near to completing one more symphony after this – there is no doubt that the 9th Symphony deals with the subject of farewell and mortality. The music critic Ernst Decsey spoke movingly of his experiences with Mahler in the summer of 1909:

"Vita fugax" [This fleeting life] ...I can still hear the deep, metallic voice pronouncing these words as the sun went down over the snow-fields of Toblach, casting them in its reddish glow. It was one of his favourite sayings...there was a hint of desperation at not being able to check the headlong rush of this fleeting life, at not being able to turn every moment into one of action.

Mahler spent most of that summer of 1909 in his summer-home near the town of Toblach, in the northern Italian Alps. Here he made significant progress on the 9th Symphony, completing the entire work in draft score before his return to America in October.

Unusually for his symphonies, there is only one reference to the 9th in Mahler's correspondence, in a letter to the conductor Bruno Walter from August 1909:

I have been working very hard and am just putting the finishing touches to a new symphony. The work itself (insofar as I know it, for I have been writing away at it blindly, and now that I have begun to orchestrate the last movement I have forgotten the first) is a very satisfactory addition to my little family. In it something is said that I have had on the tip of my tongue for some time – perhaps to be ranked beside the Fourth, if anything. (But quite different).

"Very satisfactory" seems to us now an absurd understatement when talking about this symphony, one of the greatest in the repertoire. And at a first glance the comparisons with the 4th, Mahler's 'classical' symphony, seem to end with the fact that both have four movements. But there are also deeper parallels between the two.

Alban Berg described the first movement as "the most glorious thing Mahler ever wrote". Few would disagree. Although one of Mahler's longest movements at almost half an hour, it has the most extraordinary inevitability and, in a good performance, is one unbroken line. It begins with an irregular rhythm in the lower strings and horn which returns throughout the movement at moments of crisis, most shockingly of all as an eruption from the trombones (horns in our chamber version) marked *Mit höchster Gewalt* ("With the greatest violence") at the climax. Some have suggested this represents Mahler's irregular heartbeat and therefore the spectre of death. After the six-bar introduction, where the most significant motifs of the movement are presented as fragments, the second violins enter with the main 'theme'. The descending 2nd with which this theme begins is repeated obsessively throughout and Mahler revealed in the draft score, for himself at least, that it represents the word *Leb'wohl* ("Farewell"). Mahler's biographer La Grange describes this theme as having "such an elusive, fleeting, transient character, that when all is said and done it is possible to claim that, in spite of its intense expressivity, it does not in fact exist".

A guide to the movement at the most basic level is that there is an alternation of two main ideas – one in the major and one in the minor. These are combined in a number of long build-ups and climaxes, all of which collapse and are followed by darkness. After the catastrophe of the final 'collapse', with the trombone entry already mentioned, there follows a section marked *Wie ein schwerer Kondukt* ("like a heavy funeral procession") before the reprise of the opening material, much changed. The reprise encapsulates throughout a feeling of otherworldliness, nowhere more so than in the extraordinary passage for solo flute, horn and lower strings which appears as if out of nowhere. For Berg it was a "vision of the hereafter".

The second movement was originally titled *Scherzo*, then *Menuetto infinito*. As important as the title he finally settled on, "in the tempo of a leisurely *Ländler*", are the instructions, *etwas täppisch* "somewhat clumsy" and *sehr derb* "very coarse". Later on Mahler asks for the main tune to be *Schwerfällig* "cumbersome". The movement, which contains four different types of dance – two *Ländlers* and two *Waltzes* – is a remarkable contrast with the profound first movement, as Julian Johnson has pointed out: "it is hardly possible to imagine a starker contrast than that between the tenderly nostalgic conclusion of the *Andante comodo* and the cruel caricature of the *Scherzo*, with its contrived simplicity and artificial rusticity". Much of the material is deliberately 'banal' and is ironic or even sarcastic in tone. Tempos and keys change suddenly and jarringly. So what was he trying to say? Some have suggested that the *Ländler* and *Waltzes* express his bitterness and frustration with aspects of country and city life respectively. The often quoted statement from Mahler saying a symphony "must be like the world, it must contain everything" may provide a good clue in this instance. Not everything in the world is beautiful.

The 3rd movement, *Rondo-Burleske*, takes the bitterness to an even higher level. Deryck

Cooke described it as Mahler's "most modern movement: a masterly structure of dissonant linear counterpoint, a contrived chaos built from a myriad of fragments of a theme, a ferocious outburst of fiendish laughter at the futility of everything". The philosopher Theodor Adorno called it a "virtuoso showcase on despair". Alternating with the main idea are fugal episodes and two sections with a near-quotation from Franz Lehár's operetta *The Merry Widow*, but with the same 'sidestepping' harmony that appears in the 2nd movement waltz and the finale. After the most 'modern' and dissonant of the fugato sections we arrive at delicate and tranquil music, which anticipates the finale. But it never quite gets going, the beautiful theme is mocked by the clarinet in true burlesque style and, with cruel inevitability, the devastating opening music comes back. It gets faster and even wilder and the movement ends in madness and frenzy.

Deryck Cooke provides a wonderful and succinct description of the last movement: "The *Adagio* finale transmutes horror and bitterness into courageous acceptance and unquenched belief in life". Beginning with a unison phrase for the upper strings encapsulating the 'turn' figure central to the previous movement, it arrives unexpectedly at Db major, a semitone lower than the main key of the symphony. Alternating with the almost hymn-like passages of *appassionato* are incredibly sparse passages in the minor mode. Two or three disembodied lines, marked *ohne Empfindung* ("Without expression"), move wanderingly, almost without reference to each other. Time after time the passion returns, at first with more urgency and more life force, until in the end it fades into nothing, silence itself becoming part of the music.

On the last page of the draft score we find more engravings from Mahler: "O Schönheit! Liebe! Leb'wohl. Welt! Leb'wohl!" ("Oh beauty! Love! Farewell. World! Farewell!"). Alongside the pain which these words communicate is a musical quote from one of the *Kindertotenlieder*, composed eight years earlier, there set to the words: *Der Tag ist schön auf jenen Höh'n* ("The day is beautiful in those heights!").

However we interpret it - sad farewell, vision of eternity, both or something completely different - there is no doubt that it is one of the most extraordinary endings in all music and that this symphony is one of Mahler's very greatest gifts to the world.

Programme note by Tomas Leakey

TOMAS LEAKEY – conductor



Founder and conductor of the Mahler Players, Tomas Leakey began his musical life as a trombonist in the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra. At Cambridge he studied Natural Sciences but was also active on the music scene as a pianist and trombonist. 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 Summer School of Music and with Denise Ham in London. In 2016 he was an active participant in the Järvi Winter Academy in Estonia. Tomas has also studied with Toby Purser, Adrian Brown, Susan Dingle and at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama with David Jones.

At the 2016 Aberystwyth Musicfest Tomas was the joint winner of the Orion Conductors' Prize, which comes with the position of assistant conductor to Toby Purser and the Orion Orchestra in the 2016-17 season. At this festival he also conducted the UK premiere of *Tiffany Windows* by the American composer Arlene Sierra with a chamber orchestra featuring the Solem Quartet and Magnard Ensemble as the principal players.

EMMA DONALD – leader



From the Highlands of Scotland, Emma has been playing the violin since the age of 8. Growing up, she enjoyed learning both classical and traditional Scottish music, and has strived to keep both passions running simultaneously. She has a first class honours degree in music from the University of Edinburgh, where she was leader of the three main student orchestras. This has given her the opportunity to work with inspiring conductors including Will Conway, Chris George and Russell Cowieson. Since graduating, she performs regularly with orchestras such as Mahler Players and Amicus Orchestra. She has performed in many venues across

Scotland including a duet with Nicola Benedetti in Eden Court, Inverness, solo lunchtime recitals in St Giles Cathedral and the Usher Hall, and group performances at Celtic Connections, Llangollen International Eisteddfod and the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

Emma is a full time musician based in the Highlands of Scotland. She has built up a portfolio career that includes community music work, individual and ensemble teaching, and solo and group performance.

THE MAHLER PLAYERS

The Mahler Players were founded in 2013 as a chamber orchestra for musicians, mainly based in the Highlands, to make music together at a high level. As part of the *Mahler in Miniature* project they have performed chamber versions of Mahler's 1st, 4th and 5th Symphonies, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and most of the other Mahler song cycles. They have commissioned and given the premieres of three new works, including most recently *Birth-Rebirth* by Stuart MacRae. In 2013 and 2015 they presented two educational projects where Stravinsky's *Soldier's Tale* and Walton's *Façade* were performed in local schools.

1st VIOLINS:

Emma Donald (leader),
Simon Evans, Rachel Farmer,
Eun-Joo Yoon

CLARINET, BASS/Eb CLARINET:

Mhairi Callander, James Ross

BASSOON:

Bruce Gordon

2nd VIOLINS:

David Murray, Rebecca Amphlett,
Ruth Kalitski

HORNS:

Rob Farmer, Wendy Ritchie

VIOLAS:

Jonathan Rutter, Adam Csenki

TRUMPET:

Andrew McLean

CELLOS:

Rick Lusher, Natalie Kilgallen

PERCUSSION/TIMPANI:

Alison Russell

DOUBLE BASS:

Chris Sergeant

HARP:

Erica Sinclair

FLUTE/PICCOLO:

Catherine O'Rourke

PIANO:

Faye Monteith

OBOE/COR ANGLAIS:

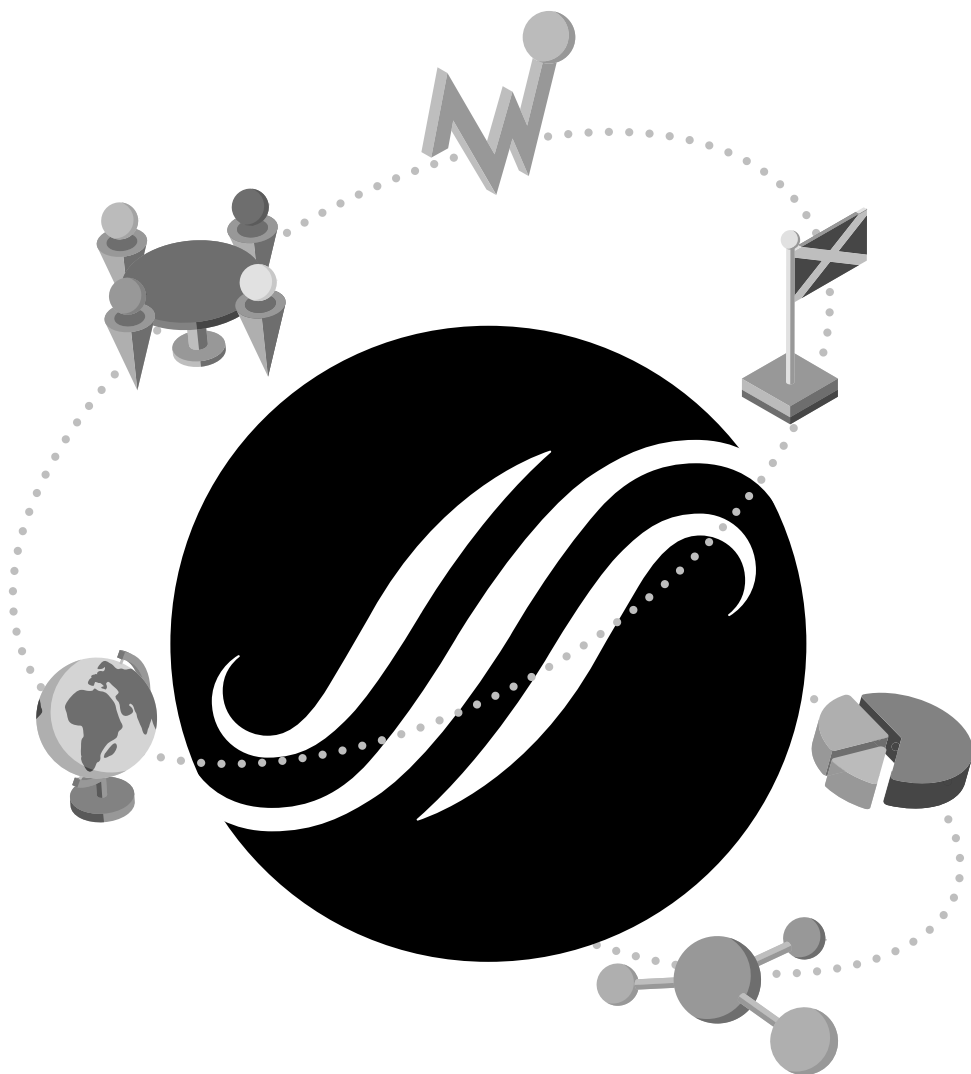
Leslie Callander

HARMONIUM:

Gordon Tocher



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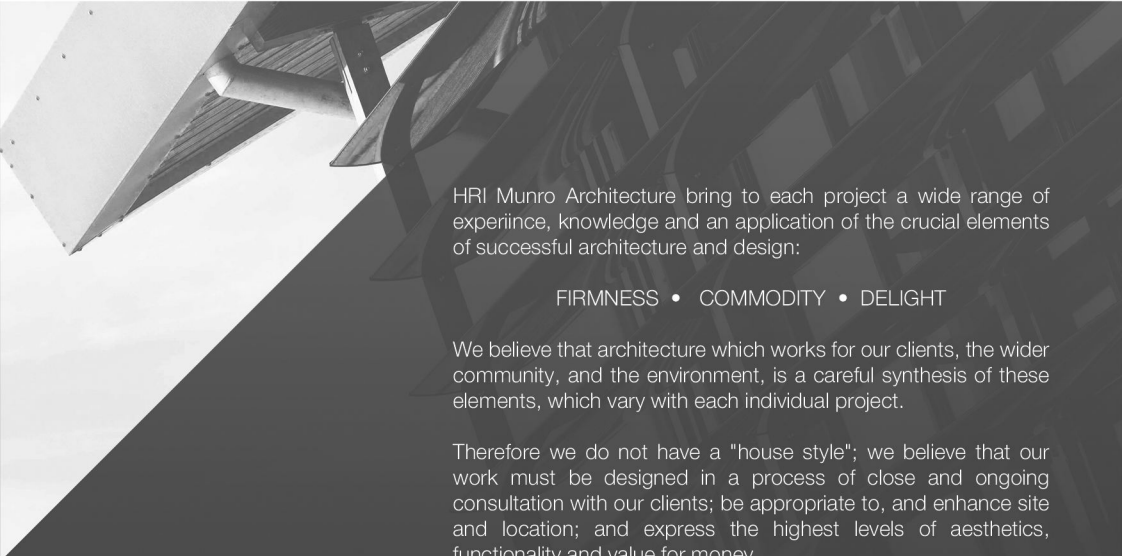


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We believe that architecture which works for our clients, the wider community, and the environment, is a careful synthesis of these elements, which vary with each individual project.

Therefore we do not have a "house style"; we believe that our work must be designed in a process of close and ongoing consultation with our clients; be appropriate to, and enhance site and location; and express the highest levels of aesthetics, functionality and value for money.

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We hope you enjoy this evening's performance. We would be grateful if you can fill in the enclosed questionnaire, which will give you the chance to enter a prize draw for free tickets to future concerts. Please ask the ushers for directions on where to leave the questionnaires.

The final project in the *Mahler in Miniature* series will be performances of the 10th Symphony in a new chamber version by Michelle Castelletti in the first half of 2017 (exact dates tbc). Please check our website and social media pages for announcements.

SUPPORTERS

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GUSTAV MAHLER SOCIETY UK

The Gustav Mahler Society UK, who are generous supporters of the Mahler Players, is an organisation that brings together people with a love for Mahler's music. Membership brings many benefits: discounted concert tickets, opportunities to attend talks, study days and dinners and four issues annually of the Society's newsletter, *The Wayfarer*. The Society was initially London-based but recently has been expanding into the north of England and Scotland. To find out more and for details on membership please visit their website: www.mahlersociety.org.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY:

Highland Young Musicians Concerts Festival

Saturday 19th November, Macdonald Aviemore Resort

Please visit www.highland-young-musicians.com for details and booking information or follow HYM on Facebook.

Inverness Choral Society

Saturday 19th November, 7.30pm, Eden Court

Rossini *Petite messe solennelle* and a selection of choruses and arias from Italian opera.

The Mahler Players is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) Charity No. SC044711