



## **Mahler: *The Sixth Symphony***

16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023. Inverness Cathedral and Strathpeffer Pavilion

Welcome to today's concert.

### **PROGRAMME**

#### **Mahler: *Symphony No. 6*** (arr. Robert Farmer)

- 1) *Allegro energico, ma non troppo*
- 2) *Andante moderato*
- 3) Scherzo: *Wuchtig*
- 4) Finale: *Allegro moderato*

Running time c.85 minutes. Please note, there will be no interval in this concert.

The Mahler Players

Conducted by Tomas Leakey

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#### The Road to Mahler 6

The impetus to reduce Mahler 6 to a chamber version for the Mahler Players came from an English cello-playing colleague. It was just as I was in the middle of reducing Mahler 7 and was starting to wonder if it would actually work. He asked what I was working on and when I told him he replied in words to the effect of "I'm not a fan of the Seventh symphony", "Are you insane?", and "Why don't you do the Sixth? It's a much better work." Knowing the sixth and having heard it on a few occasions it had never occurred to me to even think about it as I thought of it as just too massive and unwieldy.

However, and this was a thing that I came to realise whilst wading through the Seventh, Mahler's music is deceptively simple structurally. As in the seventh, the instrumentation of the sixth is huge and varied, including 2 Piccolos, 2 Cor Anglais, Bass Clarinet, Contra Bassoon, 8 horns, 4 trumpets, and almost everything but the kitchen sink in the percussion section, but all that is purely for the overall quality and variation in tone colour. The lines that he weaves, the contrapuntal confluence if you will, is far less complex than many of the other big Romantic composers, such as the Richards, Strauss and Wagner. And this, to my mind, is what actually allows the

works of Mahler to be reduced in size successfully. We may lose some of the wash of sound but we lose very little, if any, of the actual music.

Mahler was, essentially, a highly educated, hugely talented composer and conductor, but of very humble beginnings. Growing up in small Bohemian rural towns such as Kaliště and Jihlava, (both now in the Czech Republic), Mahler's first musical experiences were of a traditional or folk variety. And these influences stayed with him throughout his composing life. Even though he was composing cutting edge works, introducing new tonal pathways, expanding the orchestral palette with technique stretching parts for winds and brass especially, he never lost sight of melody. And with too many contrapuntal lines melody can become obscured.

Likewise his tonality; for all the negativity and derision that was poured upon Mahler's works by the critics at premieres, "too much noise", "ugly sounds", being "too long" or a "dearth of creativity", today Mahler's works have an effect of being almost tame in comparison to some of his contemporaries and, well, nearly all composers that followed. The result is that his orchestration ends up being not overly complex as he relies so much on the tonal colour.

Flutes double, or quadruple each other, oboes play exactly the voicing of clarinets, the Cor Anglais plays the First Horn line, 8 horns play the same line, the bassoons double or triple the Tuba line, the 6th, 7th and 8th horns double the trombones; the list is endless but, with a bit of creative manipulation, we can cast off most of this excessive fat. It's therefore comparatively easy to cover all the harmonic and melodic touchstones with the smaller group of players. The only thing is of course, like every organisation that downsizes their employees, this leaves the remaining players, especially the brass, with a much heavier workload to shoulder. But hey, that's not my problem, I'm just worried about the music.

And it was the music that Mahler worried about also. The Sixth is probably the most 'traditional' of all his symphonies. A four movement work in the form Allegro, Andante, Scherzo, Finale: Allegro. And no, after an early revision by Mahler, the Scherzo was never meant to appear as the second movement. This only came about as the Study Score, published before the Premiere for the critics, had the movements in that order. Mahler always conducted the work in the traditional order and it was that way for at least 10 years after his death.

Mahler wrote no programme notes for this Symphony. It was 'Absolute' music for its own sake. Although the subtitle of "Tragic" was coined by Mahler for a Vienna performance he never gave any explanation for this. He wrote to his friend Richard Specht in 1904: "*My 6th will pose riddles...*" The riddle or puzzle being that why, essentially at the height of his professional and personal life, would he write a work full of doom and gloom? His wife Alma was equally perplexed, even going so far as to insert biographical details into the work after Mahler's death. There is no documented evidence from Mahler that the second theme of the first movement is representative of Alma, the children frolic in the Scherzo, or the Hammer blows in the finale is fate gunning for him.

This though, is good, in my opinion. Too often we are told what and why we are listening to something and what and how we should feel. Music should be an instinctive response to sound, bringing up whatever emotions or images the individual listener imagines.

So, should people still listen to Mahler? Yes, definitely. Is transcribing Mahler 6 down from an orchestra of over a 100 players to just 36 a good idea? Yes, even if we only listen to and accept it as an arrangement, as the music itself is of high enough quality to sustain the listener, even without all the, sometimes literal, bells and whistles. Is it an easy process? Most definitely not. Am I insane for trying it? Debatable. That's for you to decide after the performance. I hope you enjoy it.

*Robert Farmer (2023)*

**Robert Farmer** was born a long time ago, in a country far, far away. He earns most of his pennies as an Instrumental Instructor with High Life Highland, teaching the next generation of brass players which end of the instrument to blow into. (It's the small end... I think.) On the days that it rains he dabbles in a few other activities apart from keeping his own noise making skills up to scratch. These include arranging ridiculous sized symphonies for wee orchestra (wait for Mahler 3!), reading an insane amount of Roman history and appreciating good beer. On the few days of sun that the Highlands gets he may be glimpsed out on his Kawasaki motorcycle desperately dodging potholes, tending his vegetable patch in a gentlemanly manner, on his way to the airport to try to see a bit more of the world, or appreciating good beer. He lives on the bonny shores of Loch Ness with one cat and one wife.

**The Mahler Players** were founded by Tomas Leakey in 2013.

As part of our *Mahler in Miniature* project we performed chamber orchestra versions of Mahler's First, Fourth, Fifth, Seventh, Ninth and Tenth Symphonies, *Das Lied von der Erde*, and most of Mahler's other song cycles. We have commissioned many new works, including by leading Scottish composer Stuart MacRae. Since 2017 we have had a particular focus on the music of Wagner, which has included the complete Act 1 from *Die Walküre*, Act 2 from *Tristan und Isolde* and substantial sections of orchestral music from *Götterdämmerung* and *Parsifal*. We have worked with some of the greatest Wagnerian singers of our era, including Sir John Tomlinson, Magdalena Anna Hofmann, Peter Wedd and Lee Bisset.

In 2021 we released our first album, which features the world premiere recording of Matthew King's *Richard Wagner in Venice: A Symphony*. This Symphony brings to life for the first time many of Wagner's late sketches, left unfinished at the time of his death in 1883, and until now largely unknown and unheard outside specialist circles. Also featuring is Wagner's own beautiful masterpiece for chamber orchestra, *Siegfried Idyll*.

### **Tomas Leakey (conductor)**

Founder of the Mahler Players, Tomas began his musical life as a trombonist and owes much to the influence of the Highland instrumental tutors and associated ensembles, especially the Highland Regional Youth Orchestra, to which he will be returning as conductor for the 2023/24 season. He studied with and was encouraged in his conducting by the formidable late George Hurst and undertook further study with Denise Ham at the London Conducting Academy. Another important influence has been the conductor Anthony Negus, who he will assist on Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* at Longborough Festival Opera in 2024. Last year, Tomas was selected as a Stipendiat by the Wagner Society of Scotland, and attended the Bayreuth Festival in this capacity in summer 2022. As well as his work with the Mahler Players and Highland Regional Youth Orchestra, he will make his debut with the Aberdeen City Orchestra in May 2024.

### **Emma Donald (leader)**

From the Highlands of Scotland, Emma Donald 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, and she works full time as a freelance musician

based in Glasgow. Emma is a founding member of the Fyrish String Quartet and the Cairdeas Trio. She plays for the Scottish Ballet orchestra, and performs with several other ensembles based in Scotland. Emma is an avid composer, and has a contemporary folk duo with harpist Isbel Pendlebury where they perform original compositions. As a studio musician, Emma has recorded violin for composers in the game, TV and film industries based in Scotland and the USA.

FIRST VIOLIN Emma Donald  
(leader), Simon Evans, Ruth  
Kalitski, Emily Birse, Francis  
Moore-Colyer

SECOND VIOLIN Andrew Birse,  
Rachel Farmer, David Murray,  
Hazel Younger, Ellis Ash

VIOLA Adam Csenki, Catherine  
Mackay, Aden Mazur

CELLO Katy Bell, Joe Donmall,  
Kate Ellingson

DOUBLE BASS Tam Darlugdach,  
Scott Matheson

FLUTE/PICCOLO Ruth Binks, Babs  
Crocker

OBOE/COR ANGLAIS Leslie  
Callander, Krys Hawryszczuk

CLARINET/Eb/BASS CLARINET  
Mhairi Callander, Mike Weare

BASSOON Bruce Gordon

HORN Robert Farmer, Wendy  
Ritchie, Willie Aristide-Deighan

TRUMPET Alasdair Grant, Sjoerd  
Tel

TROMBONE Carole Sneddon

TUBA Gavin Woods

TIMPANI Ally Russell

PERCUSSION Brodie McCash, Ally  
Russell

HARP Ciorstaidh Beaton

CELESTE Gordon Tocher

# Mahler Players 2023/24 season

## **Wagner *Siegfried Act 3* (concert performance)**

Saturday 2nd December 2023 - 8pm at Inverness Cathedral

Sunday 3rd December 2023 - 3pm at Strathpeffer Pavilion

Wanderer - Sir John Tomlinson

Siegfried - Peter Wedd

Brünnhilde - Lee Bisset

Erda - Rozanna Madylus

Conducted by Tomas Leakey

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## **Stravinsky *Dumbarton Oaks***

## **Stravinsky *Pulcinella Suite***

## **Beethoven Symphony No. 6 *Pastorale***

Saturday 4th May 2024 - 8pm at Inverness Cathedral

Sunday 5th May 2024 - 3pm at Strathpeffer Pavilion

Conducted by Tomas Leakey

Tickets on sale now from [www.mahlerplayers.co.uk](http://www.mahlerplayers.co.uk)



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- be informed about our plans ahead of public announcements.
- receive a complimentary copy of our CD, *Richard Wagner in Venice*.
- have the option to be acknowledged in our concert programmes.

If you are interested in becoming a member then please feel free to approach someone today or write to us at **donations@mahlerplayers.co.uk**. We would be delighted to discuss the network further with you.

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Additionally, we are keen to develop further relationships with businesses - local, regional and national and have a framework which offers a tiered system of sponsorship. If you would like to know more, please get in touch with us: **contact@mahlerplayers.co.uk**

You can find us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter **@mahlerplayers**.

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

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