

Friday, February 25, 2011, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Semyon Bychkov, *conductor*

PROGRAM

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) Symphony No. 2 in B-flat major, D. 125 (1815)

Largo — Allegro vivace
Andante
Menuetto: Allegro vivace
Presto vivace

INTERMISSION

Richard Wagner (1813–1883) Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*
(1854–1859)

Béla Bartók (1881–1945) Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Op. 19
(1918–1919)

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Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
Symphony No. 2 in B-flat major, D. 125

Composed in 1815.

Probably no individual composer has ever engendered such an avalanche of new music as flowed from Franz Schubert's pen in 1815. There are almost 200 separate works from that one year: the Second and Third Symphonies, a string quartet, two piano sonatas and four other large piano works, two Masses, four choral compositions, five operas and 146 songs, eight coming in a single day in May. Schubert capped the year's activities by producing *Der Erlkönig* on New Year's Eve. He was 18.

A year earlier, in the autumn of 1814, Schubert had been exempted from compulsory 13-year (!) military service because of his short stature (barely five feet) and terrible eyesight. (Newman Flower, in his biography of the gentle-natured Schubert, assessed that "as a conscript it is very doubtful he would have been worth the price of his uniform to the nation.") Though intent on becoming a composer, he reluctantly took up a position as a teacher in his father's school in the Viennese suburbs to help the family and to earn a modest living. ("Better an impoverished teacher than a starving composer," Papa Schubert admonished.) He must have been just awful in the classroom. He cared not a jot about teaching, and planned his classes so that his students would spend as much time quietly writing as possible—they scribbled away at their lessons, he jotted down masterpieces. His only real concern at that time and, indeed, throughout his life was in composing and making music with his friends. ("The state should keep me," he once told Josef Hüttenbrenner. "I have come into this world for no purpose but to compose.") Within a couple of years, he had had his fill of teaching, quit, and lived a seemingly carefree, Bohemian existence for the rest of his too-few days.

Schubert's interest in orchestral music first surfaced while he was a student at the Imperial Chapel. His talents were recognized not only by his teachers, Wenzel Ruzicka ("I can't teach him

anything else, he learned it all from God himself") and the famed Antonio Salieri ("You can do everything, you are a genius"), but also by his fellow students. Josef von Spaun, who became a lifelong friend, wrote of their school days together, "I was leader of the second violins. Little Schubert stood behind me and fiddled. [Many orchestras, except for the cellists, performed standing until the mid-19th century.] Very soon, I noticed that the little musician far surpassed me in rhythmic surety. This aroused my interest and made me realize with what animation the lad, who seemed otherwise quiet and indifferent, gave himself up to the impression of the beautiful symphonies which we played." The school orchestra tackled works by Haydn, Mozart ("You could hear the angels sing," Schubert wrote of the G minor Symphony) and early Beethoven, as well as such lesser masters as Krommer, Kozeluch, Méhul and Weigl. Schubert wrote his First Symphony in 1813, the year his voice broke and he left the Royal Chapel.

Schubert maintained many of his school friendships by taking part as violist and pianist in informal amateur musical *soirées* which ranged from intimate evenings of song to concerts for full orchestra. It was apparently for just such gatherings that he wrote his Second and Third Symphonies during those stolen hours at the schoolhouse. The works clearly show the influence of the Classical models that formed the basis of his education, while at the same time looking forward to some of the qualities of the encroaching Romantic era. Formally, they are indebted to Haydn and Mozart. Their harmonic language, however, shows an expanded range and fluidity, and their instrumental treatment, especially of the woodwinds, points toward later developments, not least in Schubert's own works. This is music of grace, warmth and youthful good humor which reflects the composer's style as surely as do any of his other compositions. While they lack the insight and profundity of his later realizations of the genre, there is nothing immature or ill-considered about the early symphonies. They are bright, melodious and ingratiating, and almost too easy to love.

Schubert's Second Symphony is surprisingly large in conception and daring in its harmonic experiments. It opens with a stately slow introduction reminiscent of that which begins Mozart's Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major (K. 543). The main body of the movement is a lengthy and tonally unconventional sonata form propelled by an almost incessant rhythmic motion in the strings. The fleet main theme enters in the first violins, and is repeated immediately by the full orchestra. Moving by way of the key of C minor, the music spills into E-flat major, in which tonality the lyrical second theme appears. It is several pages before the expected dominant key of F major makes its entry, and when it finally arrives, it carries with it not a new melody but another foray by the main theme, now serving to round out the exposition. The brief development section combines the rhythmic bustle of the main theme with the lyrical melody of the subsidiary theme. The recapitulation begins plainly enough, with quiet strings followed by a full orchestral repetition of the main theme. Its key, however, is not the expected tonic of B-flat major, but is rather the persistent E-flat major carried over from the exposition's second theme. After further peregrinations, B-flat is finally achieved with the return of the second theme. Once again the main theme is heard, maneuvered into B-flat major, as a bubbling close to this most enjoyable and unusual movement.

The slow movement is a set of variations (in E-flat) whose spirit and style have much in common with the comparable movement of Haydn's "Surprise" Symphony. There are five variations, variation IV being an excursion into a darker key; the last variation is followed by a tranquil coda. The blustery scherzo, yet another harmonic surprise, is in the stormy key of C minor (a close relative to E-flat major). The lightly scored central trio is entrusted to the woodwinds with a delicate string underscoring. The finale, which cracks along at a furious pace, mirrors the form of the opening movement: main theme in B-flat, second theme in E-flat, main theme repeated at the end of the exposition in F major. Unlike the first movement, however, the recapitulation occurs here in the expected tonic key of B-flat. The

rousing closing section of the Symphony stays firmly rooted in the home key, except for two brief detours through distant G-flat major. Solid cadential harmonies set against energetic rhythmic activity bring this buoyant and charming work to a close.

Richard Wagner (1813–1883)
Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*

Composed 1854–1859. Premiered on June 10, 1865, in Munich, conducted by Hans von Bülow.

Not all revolutions are made with the gun—some of the most important have been inspired by the pen. A pair of such nonviolent salvos were fired off in the year 1859 by two of the greatest intellectual giants of the 19th century—Charles Darwin and Richard Wagner. In that year, Darwin published his epochal *The Origin of Species* and Wagner finished his monumental music-drama *Tristan und Isolde*. Though a greater contrast in personalities could hardly be imagined than that between the gentle and retiring English naturalist and the wildly egocentric German composer, their works were related in their examination of the human condition beyond the bounds previously explored. Darwin set off a controversy about the essential nature of the physical constitution of man, and of man's relationship to the world, which continues to generate heated debate to this day. His theory, however, is a triumph of scientific observation and empirical knowledge which has established the warp through which the weft of our modern biological understanding is threaded.

Wagner, too, was exploring. His journey of the mind, however, took him not on a trip of innumerable miles in a British trading ship, but on one of passion, into the deepest recesses of the human soul. Though "Romanticism" in music had been the style for at least four decades before he launched out into the stormy world of *Tristan*, no musician had plumbed the depths of swirling emotion and white-hot eroticism that Wagner exposed in this opera. In the visual arts, some painters had pierced into this twilight domain

of the inner mind at the beginning of the century, most notably in the midnight conjurings of Fuseli and the disquieting visions of Goya, but it was Wagner who took it upon himself to devise a tonal language that could open these same vistas to music. "Every theory was quite forgotten," he wrote. "During the working-out, I myself became aware how far I had outsoared my system."

Wagner's new musical speech allowed an unprecedented laying-open of an unfathomed emotional world. "Here," he wrote, "I plunged into the inner depths of soul-events and from the innermost center of the world I fearlessly built up to its outer form.... Life and death, the whole meaning and existence of the outer world, here hang on nothing but the inner movements of the soul." It is wholly appropriate that Sigmund Freud, whose most important work was based on this same belief in subconscious motivations, should have been born in 1856, the year Wagner wrote the first notes of *Tristan*. As the opera progressed, Wagner became aware of the power of his creation. To Mathilde Wesendonck, with whom he was having an extended affair while her husband and children grew suspicious in the house next door, he admitted, "This *Tristan* is turning into something terrifying! I'm afraid the opera will be forbidden—unless it is turned into a parody by bad performances. Only mediocre performances can save me!"

Wagner provided a synopsis of the emotional progression of the action of *Tristan* whose voluptuous prose is not only a sketch of the events of the story, but also a key to understanding the surging sea of passion on which the entire world of this opera floats:

"A primitive old love poem, which, far from having become extinct, is constantly fashioning itself anew, and has been adopted by every European language of the Middle Ages, tells of Tristan and Isolde. Tristan, the faithful vassal, woos for his king her for whom he dares not avow his own love, Isolde. Isolde, powerless than to do otherwise than obey the wooer, follows him as bride to his lord. Jealous of this infringement of her rights, the Goddess of Love takes her revenge. As the result of a happy mistake,

she allows the couple to taste of the love potion which, in accordance with the custom of the times, and by way of precaution, the mother had prepared for the husband who should marry her daughter from political motives, and which, by the burning desire which suddenly inflames them after tasting it, opens their eyes to the truth and leads to the avowal that for the future they belong only to each other.

"Henceforth, there is no end to the longings, the demands, the joys and woes of love. The world, power, fame, splendor, honor, knighthood, fidelity, friendship—all are dissipated like an empty dream. One thing only remains: longing, longing, insatiable longing, forever springing up anew, pining and thirsting. Death, which means passing away, perishing, never awakening, their only deliverance.... Powerless, the heart sinks back to languish in longing, in longing without attaining; for each attainment only begets new longing, until in the last stage of weariness the foreboding of the highest joy of dying, of no longer existing, of the last escape into that wonderful kingdom from which we are furthest off when we are most strenuously striving to enter therein. Shall we call it death? Or is it the hidden wonderworld out of which an ivy and vine, entwined with each other, grew up upon Tristan's and Isolde's grave, as the legend tells us?"

Wagner's description opens as many questions as it answers. Such ambiguity is one of the most important characteristics of the opera, which has inspired many learned treatises from historians, philosophers, psychologists and musicians over the years in attempts to explain its "meaning." There will never be one single, "correct" explanation of *Tristan* because of the profoundly individual manner in which this music affects each listener. In the words of Richard Strauss, the inheritor of Wagner's mantle as the pre-eminent composer of German opera, "In Wagner, music reached its greatest capacity for expression." This capacity grows chiefly from the harmonic style of *Tristan*, its building of enormous climaxes through the continuing frustration of expected resolutions of chord progressions. The lack of fulfillment creates an

overwhelming sense of longing until the moment when the pent-up yearning is finally released in a magnificent, cathartic outpouring, heightened by its long period of expectancy.

The sense of longing is generated right at the beginning of the opera. Its *Prelude* is built, in the composer's words, from "one long series of linked phrases," each of which is left hanging, unresolved, in silence. Of the remainder of the *Prelude* and its progression to the *Liebestod* ("Love-Death"), Wagner wrote, it moves from "the first timidiest lament of inappeasable longing, the tenderest shudder, to the most terrible outpouring of an avowal of hopeless love, traversing all phases of the vain struggle against the inner ardor until this, sinking back upon itself, seems to be extinguished in death." The *Prelude* is constructed as a long arch of sound, beginning faintly and building to a huge climax near its center before dying away to silence. In Wagner's concert version, the *Liebestod* follows without pause, and it, too, generates a magnificent tonal gratification at the point near the end of the opera where the lovers find their only possible satisfaction in welcome death. Of this sublime moment, Wagner wrote, "What Fate divided in life now springs into transfigured life in death: the gates of union are thrown open. Over Tristan's body the dying Isolde receives the blessed fulfillment of ardent longing, eternal union in measureless space, without barriers, without fetters, inseparable."

Béla Bartók (1881–1945)
Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*, Op. 19

Composed in 1918–1919. Ballet premiered on November 27, 1926, in Cologne, conducted by Hans Strobach; suite premiered on October 15, 1928, in Budapest, conducted by Ernő Dohnányi.

Bartók composed three works for the stage. The first, *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (1911), is a powerful one-act opera packed with symbolism in which the composer combined his interest in French Impressionism (especially Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) with his vast knowledge of folk songs

and legends and Hungarian prosody. The ballet *The Wooden Prince* (1915), Bartók's second theater piece, is built around a silly fable in which a beautiful princess falls in love—with the *walking staff* of a handsome prince! Both of these works were banned after some initial success because their librettist, Béla Balázs, had been forced into political exile. Bartók's third and final stage effort was the ballet *The Miraculous Mandarin*.

The following synopsis of the plot is contained in the orchestral score: "In a shabby room in the slums, three tramps, bent on robbery, force a girl to lure in prospective victims from the street. A down-at-the-heels cavalier and a timid youth, who succumb to her attractions, are found to have thin wallets, and are thrown out. The third 'guest' is the eerie Mandarin. His impassivity frightens the girl, who tries to unfreeze him by dancing—but when he feverishly embraces her, she runs from him in terror. After a wild chase he catches her, at which point the three tramps leap from their hiding place, rob him of everything he has, and try to smother him under a pile of cushions. But he gets to his feet, his eyes fixed passionately on the girl. They run him through with a sword; he is shaken, but his desire is stronger than his wounds, and he hurls himself on her. They hang him up; but it is impossible for him to die. Only when they cut him down and the girl takes him into her arms do his wounds begin to bleed, and he dies."

Bartók had to take the courage of his artistic convictions firmly into hand when *The Miraculous Mandarin* was mounted in Cologne on November 27, 1926. He realized that its lurid story and the graphic music that follows it so closely would create problems, not only with the censors but also with other public officials. He had to wait only until the premiere to have his fears confirmed. The city fathers of Cologne closed the show after just a single performance on the grounds that it outraged the moral standards of the community. The ballet was not staged until after Bartók's death in Budapest, the composer's home, and did not appear in New York until 1951.

This tawdry story called from Bartók one of his greatest scores. More than just a musical

depiction of a lurid tale, the vehemence of the work also arose in part from Bartók's reaction to the searing social and intellectual winds sweeping across Europe in 1918: the political upheaval, particularly violent in Hungary, following World War I; the exposure of deep-seated personal motivations, often flamed with elements of sex and violence, by such scientists and artists as Freud, Klimt, Kokoschka, Berg, Munch and Schoenberg; and the technical and expressive avenues opened by Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, which greatly influenced *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Bartók realized that the score deserved a life independent of the troubled productions of the complete ballet, so he derived a "suite" from it in 1928. Unlike most suites, however, this one was not a series of scattered excerpts plucked from the score but was created simply by the elimination of the closing pages, namely the scene of the Mandarin's death, so that the Suite ends with the breathtaking music of the Mandarin's pursuit of the girl, a passage that critic and musicologist Alfred Einstein considered "the wildest chase in modern music."

The Miraculous Mandarin is an orchestral *tour de force*, Bartók's ultimate achievement in sheer brilliance of sonority. The music vividly etches the characters and episodes of the story: the opening rush of traffic on a gritty city street (the bass trombone portrays the braying auto horns), the thrice-repeated propositions of the girl (solo clarinet), the quasi-Oriental music introducing the Mandarin (trills and glisses for the strings and woodwinds, with the trombones in weird parallel harmonies), the almost unbearable tension of the chase. Bartók intended that this work arouse listeners not just because of its sordid story but also because of the richness of its artistic conception and the excellence of its execution. The fearsome and astonishing power of the music is evidence that he succeeded.

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Saturday, February 26, 2011, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Semyon Bychkov, *conductor*

PROGRAM

Robert Schumann (1810–1856) Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61
(1845–1846)

Sostenuto assai — Allegro ma non troppo
Scherzo: Allegro vivace
Adagio espressivo
Allegro molto vivace

INTERMISSION

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73 (1877)

Allegro non troppo
Adagio non troppo
Allegretto grazioso (Quasi Andantino) —
Presto ma non assai — Tempo I —
Presto ma non assai — Tempo I
Allegro con spirito

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Robert Schumann (1810–1856) Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61

Composed in 1845–1846. Premiered on November 5, 1846, in Leipzig, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn.

The years 1845 and 1846 were difficult ones for Schumann. In 1844, he had gone on a concert tour of Russia with his wife, Clara, one of the greatest pianists of the era, and he was frustrated and humiliated at being recognized only as the husband of the featured performer and not in his own right as a distinguished composer and critic. The couple's return to Leipzig found Robert nervous, depressed and suffering from occasional lapses of memory. He had a complete breakdown soon after, and his doctor advised the Schumanns to return to the quieter atmosphere of Dresden, where Robert had known happy times earlier in his life. They moved in October 1844, and Schumann recovered enough to completely sketch the Second Symphony in December of the following year. He began the orchestration in February, but many times found it impossible to work and could not finish the score until October.

Clara noted that her husband went night after night without sleep, arising in tears in the morning. His doctor described further symptoms: "So soon as he busied himself with intellectual matters, he was seized with fits of trembling, fatigue, coldness of the feet, and a state of mental distress culminating in a strange terror of death, which manifested itself in the fear inspired in him by heights, by rooms on an upper story, by all metal objects, even keys, and by medicines, and the fear of being poisoned." Schumann complained of continual ringing and roaring in his ears, and it was at times even painful for him to hear music. He was almost frantic for fear of losing his mind. His physical symptoms, he was convinced, were a direct result of his mental afflictions. He was wrong.

In an article in *The Musical Times*, Eric Sams investigated Schumann's illness, and his findings are both convincing and revealing. In those pre-antibiotic times, a common treatment for syphilis was a small dose of liquid mercury.

The mercury relieved the external signs of the disease—but at the cost of poisoning the patient (victim?). Schumann, many years before his devoted marriage to Clara, had both the infection and the treatment. The problems he lamented—ringing ears, cold extremities, depression, sleeplessness, nerve damage—were the result of the mercury poisoning. Sensitive as he was, Schumann first imagined and then was truly afflicted with his other symptoms until he became ill in both mind and body. It was, however, an insidious physical problem that led to his psychological woes rather than the other way around, as he believed.

Seen against this background of pathetic suffering, Schumann's Second Symphony emerges as a miracle of the human spirit over the most trying circumstances. In his own words, "I was in bad shape physically when I began the work, and was afraid my semi-invalid state could be detected in the music. However, I began to feel more myself when I finished the whole work." Of the philosophical basis of the Symphony, undoubtedly related to Schumann's emotional state, Mosco Carner wrote, "The emotional drama in this Symphony leads from the fierce struggle with sinister forces (first movement) to triumphant victory (finale), while the intervening stages are febrile restlessness (scherzo) and profound melancholy (adagio)." This progression from darkness to light as a musical process had its noble precedents in the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies of Beethoven, a musician whom Schumann revered, and it is probable that Schumann envisioned the construction of his Second Symphony as a mirror of his return to health during its composition.

This Symphony is the most formally traditional of the four that Schumann wrote. It comprises four independent movements closely allied to Classical models. The sonata-allegro of the first movement is prefaced by a slow introduction that presents a majestic, fanfare-like theme in the brass and a sinuous, legato melody in the strings. (The brass theme recurs several times during the course of the work and serves as a motto linking this first movement with later ones.) The tempo quickens to begin the

exposition, with the main theme heard in jagged, dotted rhythms. The second theme continues the mood of the main theme to complete the short exposition. The lengthy development section is mostly based on the second theme. The recapitulation employs a rich orchestral palette to heighten the return of the exposition's themes, with the fanfare-motto heard briefly in the coda to conclude the movement.

The scherzo ("Schumann's happiest essay in this form," according to Robert Schaufler) has two trios: the first dominated by triplet rhythms in the woodwinds, the second by a legato chorale for strings. The horns and trumpets intone the motto theme at the end of the movement. The wonderful third movement is constructed around a nostalgic melody, one of Schumann's greatest inspirations, first presented by the violins. A brief, pedantic contrapuntal exercise acts as a middle section, after which the lovely theme returns. The brilliant and vigorous finale is cast in sonata-allegro form, with a second theme derived from the opening notes of the melody of the preceding adagio. The majestic coda begins with a soft restatement of the motto theme by trumpets and trombone, and gradually blossoms into a heroic hymn of victory in the full brass choir. It is a grand conclusion to a work which displays, in Philip Spitta's ringing phrases, "grave and mature depth of feeling, bold decisiveness of form and overpowering wealth of expression."

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 73

Composed in 1877. Premiered on December 30, 1877, in Vienna, by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Hans Richter.

"The new symphony is merely a 'sinfonia,' and I shall not need to play it for you beforehand. You have only to sit down at the piano, put your little feet on the two pedals in turn, and strike the chord of F minor several times in succession, first in the treble, then in the bass, *fortissimo* and *pianissimo*, and you will gradually gain

a vivid impression of my latest work." With the premiere of his pastoral Second Symphony only a month away, Brahms served up this red herring in early November to his friend, correspondent and supporter Elisabeth von Herzogenberg to playfully mislead her about the character of this lovely work. He tossed another false clue to Clara Schumann when he told her that the halcyon first movement was "quite elegiac in character," and, again to Elisabeth, that so sad a piece would require the orchestra to play with crepe bands on their sleeves and the printed score would have to be bordered in black. "The new Symphony is so melancholy that you will not be able to bear it," he told his publisher, Fritz Simrock. Such statements are characteristic of Brahms both in their eccentric, sometimes cranky humor, and their reticence to divulge any information about a work that had not been publicly displayed. He was always reluctant to discuss or even mention new pieces to anyone, even to such trusted friends as Clara Schumann. (Clara begged him for years to complete his First Symphony without knowing that the project was almost constantly on his mind and on his desk during the time.) He usually destroyed all his drafts and tentative sketches for a finished composition so that his preliminary thoughts and working procedures remain a mystery. He refused to be disturbed while composing. Once, a youthful admirer, unable to gain an audience with Brahms, set up a ladder to climb to the composer's second-story window to deliver his encomium. Brahms, deep in work and detesting any distraction, angrily threw the ladder from the sill, causing the young man no little harm. It is because of such secretiveness that little is known about the actual composition of the Second Symphony.

In the summer of 1877, Brahms repaired to the village of Pörschach in the Carinthian hills of southern Austria. He wrote to a Viennese friend, "Pörschach is an exquisite spot, and I have found a lovely and apparently pleasant abode in the Castle! You may tell everybody this; it will impress them.... The place is replete with Austrian coziness and kindheartedness."

The lovely country surroundings inspired Brahms's creativity to such a degree that he wrote to the critic Eduard Hanslick, "So many melodies fly about, one must be careful not to tread on them." Brahms plucked from the gentle Pörschach breezes a surfeit of beautiful music for his Second Symphony, which was apparently written quickly during that summer—a great contrast to the 15-year gestation of the preceding symphony. He brought the manuscript with him when he returned to Vienna at the end of the summer, and played it at an informal gathering in a four-hand piano version with Ignaz Brüll in September. Brahms kept the true nature of the piece from the friends who were not at that gathering, and he was delighted by their surprised response at the public premiere late in December.

Brahms's misleading statements depicting the Second Symphony as a tragic work were plausible in view of the stony grandeur of its predecessor. The premiere audience had every expectation of hearing a grand, portentous statement similar in tone to the First Symphony, but it was treated instead to the composer's most gentle and sun-dappled music. After their initial befuddlement had passed, they warmed to the occasion as the performance progressed, and such was their enthusiasm at the end that they demanded an encore of the third movement. Brahms himself allowed, "[The work] sounded so merry and tender, as though it were especially written for a newly wedded couple." Early listeners heard in it "a glimpse of Nature, a spring day amid soft mosses, springing woods, birds' notes, and the bloom of flowers." Richard Specht, the composer's biographer, found it "suffused with the sunshine and warm winds playing on the waters." Comparisons with Beethoven's "Pastoral" Symphony were inevitable, though Brahms never revealed any specific programmatic intention rippling among these notes. Despite its exploration of a new, gentler world of emotions, the work displays again the peerless technical mastery that marked the First Symphony. The conductor Felix Weingartner thought it the best of the four symphonies: "The

stream of invention has never flowed so fresh and spontaneous in other works by Brahms, and nowhere else has he colored his orchestration so successfully." To which critic Olin Downes added, "In his own way, and sometimes with long sentences, he formulates his thought, and the music has the rich chromaticism, depth of shadow and significance of detail that characterize a Rembrandt portrait."

Its effortless technique, rich orchestral writing and surety of emotional effect make this composition a splendid sequel to Brahms's First Symphony. The earlier work, perhaps the best first symphony anyone ever composed, is filled with a sense of struggle and hard-won victory, an accurate mirror of Brahms's monumental efforts over many years to shape a worthy successor to Beethoven's symphonies. ("You have no idea how it feels to hear behind you the tramp of a giant like Beethoven," Brahms lamented.) The Second Symphony, while at least the equal of the First in technical mastery, differs markedly in its mood, which, in Eduard Hanslick's words, is "cheerful and likable...[and] may be described in short as peaceful, tender, but not effeminate." So taken aback by the work's pastoral quality was the Leipzig critic Dörffel that he wrote of the performance conducted by the composer in his city only two weeks after the Viennese premiere, "We require from him music that is something more than simply pretty...when he comes before us as a symphonist." Though this Symphony is more "simply pretty" than any other by Brahms, there is also a rich emotional vein and inevitable structural logic that motivates the music. It is understandable that, of the four he wrote in the genre, this one has probably had, over its history, the most performances.

The Symphony opens with a three-note motive, presented softly by the low strings, which is the germ seed from which much of the thematic material of the movement grows. The horns sing the principal theme, which includes, in its third measure, the three-note motive. The sweet second theme is given in duet by the cellos and violas. The development begins with the horn's main theme, but is mostly concerned with

permutations of the three-note motive around which some stormy emotional sentences accumulate. The placid mood of the opening returns with the recapitulation, and remains largely undisturbed until the end of the movement.

The second movement plumbs the deepest emotions in the Symphony. Many of its early listeners found it difficult to understand, because they failed to perceive that, in constructing the four broad paragraphs that comprise the Second Symphony, Brahms deemed it necessary to balance the radiant first movement with music of thoughtfulness and introspection in the second. This movement actually covers a wide range of sentiments, shifting, as it does, between light and shade—major and minor. Its form is sonata-allegro, whose second theme is a gently syncopated strain intoned by the woodwinds above the cellos' pizzicato notes.

The following *Allegretto* is a delightful musical sleight-of-hand. The oboe presents a naive, folk-like tune in moderate triple meter as the movement's principal theme. The strings take over the melody in the first Trio, but play it in an energetic duple-meter transformation. The return of the sedate original theme is again interrupted by another quick-tempo variation, this one a further development of motives from Trio I. A final traversal of the main theme closes this delectable movement.

The finale bubbles with the rhythmic energy and high spirits of a Haydn symphony. The main theme starts with a unison gesture in the strings, but soon becomes harmonically active and spreads through the orchestra. The second theme is a broad, hymnal melody initiated by the strings. The development section, like that of many of Haydn's finales, begins with a statement of the main theme in the tonic before branching into discussion of the movement's motives. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes, and leads with an inexorable drive through the triumphant coda (based on the hymnal melody) to the brazen glow of the final trombone chord.

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Sunday, February 27, 2011, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Semyon Bychkov, *conductor*

PROGRAM

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) Symphony No. 6 in A minor, “Tragic”
(1903–1904)

Allegro energico, ma non troppo
Scherzo: Wuchtig
Andante moderato
Finale: Allegro moderato

This program will be performed without intermission.

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Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)
Symphony No. 6 in A minor, “Tragic”

Composed in 1903–1904. Premiered on May 27, 1906, in Essen, conducted by the composer.

Perhaps nowhere is the complex, fascinating, slightly disturbing character of Gustav Mahler better seen than in the composition of his Sixth Symphony: perfectionist conductor, obsessive creator; doting father, loving but insensitive husband; universal philosopher, filled with self-doubt—all are reflected in this awesome work which many regard as his greatest symphony in its masterful reconciliation of form and matter.

In 1902, Mahler married Alma Schindler, daughter of the Viennese painter Emil Schindler. Alma was a talented musician, a fellow pupil of the teacher Alexander von Zemlinsky with Arnold Schoenberg, privy to the highest circles of Austrian cultural aristocracy. She was said to be the most beautiful woman in Vienna. Later in the year, their first child, Maria, was born. Little “Putzi,” as they nicknamed her, became the joy of Mahler’s life, and she was one of the two things that could get his mind off his work. (Strenuous physical exercise was the other. He was an inveterate swimmer and hiker.) Alma recalled the relationship of father and daughter in her memoirs of her husband. “Each morning our child went into Mahler’s study,” she wrote. “There they talked for a long time. Nobody knows what they said. I never disturbed them. We had a persnickety English girl who always brought the child to the door of the study clean and neat. After a long time Mahler came back, hand-in-hand with the child. Usually she was plastered with jam from head to toe, and my first job was to pacify the English girl. But they both came out so close to each other, and so content with their talk, that I was secretly pleased. She was absolutely his child.”

Mahler loved Alma as well, and he often expressed his affection in charming ways, as she recounted: “In the summer of 1903, two movements of the Sixth were finished and the ideas for the remaining movements were completed in his head. Since I was playing a lot of

Wagner at that time, Mahler thought of a sweet joke. He composed for me the only love song he ever wrote, *Liebst Du um Schönheit* [‘If you love for beauty, do not love me’], and he put it between the title page and the first page of *Die Walküre*. Then he waited day after day for me to come across it, but for once I did not open this score at that time. Suddenly he said: ‘Today I fancy having a look at *Walküre*.’ He opened the book and the song fell out. I was happy beyond words and we played the song that day at least twenty times.”

Yet this same man was just as often completely insensitive to her needs. She had to miss many parties and receptions for lack of the proper evening clothes which it never occurred to him to provide for her. She had to manage the household around his schedule and desires, becoming a virtual sacrificial slave at the altar of his blazing ambition. One of the conditions of their marriage was that she give up composing, a field in which she had shown a fine talent as a young woman and which was her primary creative outlet. Despite her loving devotion to Mahler and his work, she accumulated a burning anger with him during the years of their marriage. It exploded when they were living in New York City in the last years of his life, and it came as a blinding revelation to him that he had denied her a life of her own. He was so shaken that he agreed to an analysis by none other than Sigmund Freud. The two met in Leyden, Holland, and Mahler regained much of his emotional equilibrium, but he carried a massive guilt with him for the rest of his days. The afternoon that he finally sat at the piano and played the lovely songs Alma had written some ten years earlier, but which he had refused until then to acknowledge, must have been a time of intense regret.

The summers of 1903 and 1904, spent in the country at Maiernigg, when he was working on the Sixth Symphony, were times of apparent happiness for Mahler and his family. Though Alma’s misgivings about their life together were already beginning to fester, the birth of a second girl, on June 15, 1904, gave her a more pressing focus for her thoughts than

her own disappointments. Mahler adored his daughters and loved the country, and he seemed contented. He was at the height of his creative powers and work on the new Symphony went so well that he even found time to compose some songs. The music he wrote, however, was far removed in mood from the halcyon happiness of Maiernigg. Alma noted in September 1904, “He finished the Sixth Symphony and added three more to the two *Kindertotenlieder* (‘Songs on the Death of Children’) he had composed in 1901. I found this incomprehensible. I can understand setting such frightful words to music if one had no children, or had lost those one had.... What I cannot understand is bewailing the deaths of children who were in the best health and spirits, hardly an hour after having kissed them and fondled them. I exclaimed at the time: ‘For heaven’s sake, don’t tempt Providence!’” Of the Symphony, she said, “In the third movement, he represented the a-rhythmic games of the two little children, tottering in zigzags over the sand. Ominously, the childish voices become more and more tragic, and at the end die out in a whimper. In the last movement he described himself or, as he later said, his hero: ‘It is the hero, on whom fall three blows of fate, the last of which fells him like a tree.’ Those were his words.” Mahler’s explanation for writing such music? “I don’t choose what to compose. It chooses me,” he said, fatalistically.

The visions of terror and death that Mahler created on a beautiful Austrian summer’s day were more than simply upsetting—they were prophetic. The finale’s “three blows of Fate,” portrayed by a shattering cry from the full orchestra and the strongest possible clap from a hammer (usually played on the bass drum), befell Mahler in 1907. Early in the year, a serious heart ailment was discovered; on June 15, his darling “Putzi,” not yet five years old, died; one month later, he was forced from his directorship of the Vienna Opera. In her preface to Mahler’s letters, Alma commented, “He said so often: All my works are an *anticipando* of the life to come.”



MAHLER, HEIR TO TWO centuries of the greatest and most profound German music, saw his symphonies as embodying an entire world of experience and emotion—virtually a philosophy in tone. As did all of his sensitive European contemporaries, he perceived around him a cracking of his society, one that he felt was going to bring down the very political, social and artistic structures within which he had built his life. He could not, of course, foretell his own calamities or the start of World War I in 1914 that realized his vision, but he could bring to his works a sense of portentous uneasiness and irreplaceable loss that mirror the era in which he lived. “Mahler’s music expressed the intuitive forebodings of an artist listening to the distant rumblings of the future and, as such, formulating the apprehensions of the suppressed and inarticulate...who found in him, the Austrian Jew, their most sympathetic spokesman,” commented Hans Redlich. The overwhelming poignancy of his music arises from his juxtaposition of these cosmic concerns with the simple, personal joys of nature, family, love and the other values that nurture our humanity.

With an insight and intensity of feeling granted to few, Mahler perceived the great delicacy of life and the potentially overwhelming threats continually ranged against it, and this proved almost more than he could bear at times. Alma believed that “not one of his works came so directly from his inmost heart as this Sixth Symphony.” As he had done with earlier works, as soon as the Symphony was completed he led her to his isolated little composer’s cottage and played it for her. “These occasions were always very solemn ones.... We both wept that day. The music and what it foretold touched us so deeply.” They shared a similar experience when the work was being premiered in Essen in 1906. “None of his works moved him so deeply at its first hearing as this,” Alma wrote. “We came to the last rehearsals, to the dress rehearsal—to the last movement with its three great blows of fate. When it was over, Mahler paced back and forth in the artists’ room, sobbing, wringing his hands, unable to control himself.... On the day of the concert Mahler was afraid that the agitation this

music caused him might make him break down during the performance, so, out of shame and anxiety, he did not conduct the Symphony well. He hesitated to bring out the dark omen behind this terrible last movement.” It is little wonder that Mahler appended the title “Tragic” to this work, the only one of his symphonies that ends in a minor key.

So grand were the visions Mahler sought to condense into his symphonies that he seems to have felt the music barely adequate to hold them. Even after his thoughts were down on paper, he continued to refine and adjust them because “he was always concerned above all with the attainment of the maximum clarity; this was more important to him than the color and charm of the sound,” explained the conductor Klaus Pringsheim, a Mahler protégé. Mahler tinkered with the Sixth Symphony for years. At one of the first rehearsals, for example, he was dissatisfied because the bass drum was not thunderous enough to do justice to the fateful blows in the finale so he had a giant chest specially made and hide stretched across its open side. Despite the most forceful blows of the percussionist and of Mahler himself with a large club, this contraption yielded no more than a dull thud, and the original bass drum was allowed to resume its place. Mahler adjusted the instrumentation every time he returned to the Symphony, often following the advice of young *répétiteurs* he stationed in the auditorium to judge the effect. Even the overall structure of the work came into question. For a while he thought that the *Adagio* should precede the *Scherzo*, the reverse of their order at the premiere, but finally decided the original *Scherzo-Adagio* sequence was preferable. He vacillated on leaving intact the finale’s third hammer-blow—the death-stroke—for what seem to have been reasons of superstition. He never made a final decision on the matter, so conductors are today left with a perplexing problem.

Just before the short score of the Symphony was completed in September 1904, Mahler wrote to his biographer Richard Specht, “My Sixth will present riddles to the solution of which only a generation will dare apply itself

which has previously absorbed and digested my first five symphonies.” Since even Mahler himself shied away from clarifying the message of the finale for the work’s premiere, it was only to be expected that this work was the one of his symphonies which took longest to achieve public acceptance. It did not achieve wide favor when it was first heard in May 1906 (Mahler was deeply wounded by Richard Strauss’s criticism of its “excessively noisy orchestration”), nor when it was played later that season in Munich, Vienna, Leipzig and Dresden. It seems not to have been performed anywhere between 1907 and Mahler’s death four years later. The judgment of Oskar Fried, one of the composer’s most important disciples, was called into question by the critics when he conducted the Symphony in successive seasons in Vienna in 1919 and 1920. The work was not heard in America until 1947, the last of his completed symphonies to reach this country. Yet Hans Redlich wrote in a 1920 article that this work was “Mahler’s essential heritage for the future.” The “Second Viennese School” immediately adopted the piece. Alban Berg wrote to Anton Webern that it is “the one and only Sixth—despite the ‘Pastoral’ [of Beethoven].” Berg admitted that the Symphony’s finale was the starting point for the last of his *Three Orchestral Pieces*, Op. 6, of 1914. Arnold Schoenberg wrote essays in 1913 and 1934 lovingly analyzing the structural subtleties and melodic construction of the *Andante*. It has only been since the 1960s, when recordings first opened to the world the breathtaking scope of Mahler’s achievement, that the Sixth Symphony has taken its proper place as one of his best—some say his greatest—works.



MAHLER DID NOT GIVE a written program or explanation for this Symphony. “No music is worth anything when the listener has to be told what experience it embodies—in other words, what he is expected to experience himself,” he said. He was right. No attempt to transfer into words Mahler’s eloquent expression of the vast, varied and powerful emotional resonances

in the work could do it justice. In addition, the Sixth is the most classical, most abstract in form of all his symphonies. It was as though he feared that his deepest, most moving thoughts would fly apart into unintelligibility if they were not contained in the strictest structural molds. The work’s “program” or “message” or “meaning” is just as ineffable as it is undeniable.

The first movement is in sonata form. A short, five-measure preface establishes the A minor tonality and the violent, martial nature that dominates much of the movement. The wide leap of an octave characterizes the main theme, presented by the strings. As a transition to the contrasting theme, the timpani pound out a heavy motive that Mahler designated as the “rhythm of catastrophe.” Above these ominous whacks, he placed another of his musical codes for Fate, a loud major triad slipping into a soft minor one, here intoned by the trumpets. Placed against these stern musical thoughts is the sweeping second theme, in which, Mahler told Alma, he tried to capture her youthful, exuberant personality. The exposition, as in the Classical model, is directed to be repeated. The development, begun with the timpani strokes, is an extended working-out of the earlier themes into which is introduced another of Mahler’s musical symbols—the hollow-sounding tintinnabulation of cowbells. This effect, “the last earthly sounds heard from the valley below by the spirit departing from the mountain top,” explained the composer, was meant to represent the most remote loneliness. It occurs again in the Seventh Symphony. The recapitulation returns the martial main theme and Alma’s sweeping melody, and from them grows an extended coda which achieves a certain belligerent affirmation in its closing pages.

Hans Redlich wrote that the “chief characteristic of the *Scherzo* is its sinister artificiality.” In place of the cheerful dance of the traditional scherzo is a brutal essay in steely A minor that is mocking and derisive in spirit, and even parodies fragments of the opening movement’s themes to build its own melodic material. The more lightly scored trio, spun from motives stated in the *Scherzo*’s opening pages, is marked

Altväterisch—“in an antiquated manner.” These are the mixed-meter strains that Alma believed represented her children’s clumsy games, and that so frightened her in their eventual disintegration as the movement concludes.

The slow third movement, in the harmonically distant key of E-flat major, is akin in mood to the somber introspection of the *Kindertotenlieder*. Its only clear musical connection with the rest of the work is the symbolic use of cowbells, and, taken by itself, it seems a lovely, if somewhat hyper-emotional display of Post-Romantic sensibility. In its larger aspect, however, as an integral part of the Symphony’s structure, it becomes a foil to the surrounding menace, an almost painfully beautiful interlude—a pale child’s wan smile amid the rubble. Formally, it is built around three returns of the legato main theme separated by episodes that are, by turns, pastoral, mysterious and passionate.

In 1921, the distinguished scholar Paul Bekker wrote of this work, “All the essentials of the symphonic action are entrusted to the finale more decisively than ever.” This magnificent, searing closing movement, almost a half-hour in length, culminates the vision that inspired the work. The form is a large sonata structure of enormous complexity, but the emotional thrust of the music is organized around the three “blows of Fate” and the bleak concluding dirge in the low brass. Long developmental lines, perhaps representing rising hope and confidence, are cut short by the sinister strokes. (Though Mahler called them “hammer-strokes” in the score, he instructed that the timbre must be “short, powerful, but dull in sound...not of metallic character,” so the part is usually played on bass drum.) The third and final stroke, which is followed by the timpani’s “rhythm of catastrophe” from the first movement and the major-minor chord shift, leads directly to the coda, a solemn threnody murmured in sepulchral tones by the trombones and tuba. A single, final cry from the full orchestra above the faltering heartbeat of the timpani’s motive ends the Symphony.

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VIENNA PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

Concertmaster

Rainer Küchl
Rainer Honeck
Volkhard Steude
Albena Danailova*

First Violin

Eckhard Seifert
Hubert Kroisamer
Josef Hell
Jun Keller
Daniel Froschauer
Herbert Linke
Günter Seifert
Wolfgang Brand
Clemens Hellsberg
Erich Schagerl
Bernhard Biberauer
Martin Kubik
Milan Setena
Martin Zalodek
Kirill Kobantchenko
Wilfried Hedenborg
Johannes Tomböck
Pavel Kuzmichev
Isabelle Ballot
Andreas Großbauer
Olesya Kurylak*
Ondrej Janoska*

Second Violin

Raimund Lissy
Tibor Kovác
Christoph Koncz*
Gerald Schubert
René Staar
Helmut Zehetner
Alfons Egger
George Fritthum
Alexander Steinberger
Harald Krumpöck
Michal Kostka
Benedict Lea
Marian Lesko
Tomas Vinklat
Johannes Kostner

Martin Klimek
Yefgen Andrusenko
Shkëlzen Doli
Dominik Hellsberg
Holger Groh
Maxim Brilinsky*

Viola

Heinrich Koll
Tobias Lea
Christian Frohn
Wolf-Dieter Rath
Robert Bauerstatter
Gerhard Marschner
Gottfried Martin
Hans Peter Ochsenhofer
Mario Karwan
Martin Lemberg
Elmar Landerer
Innokenti Grabko
Michael Strasser
Ursula Plaichinger
Thilo Fechner
Thomas Hajek
Daniela Ivanova

Cello

Franz Bartolomey
Tamás Varga
Robert Nagy
Friedrich Dolezal
Raphael Flieder
Csaba Bornemisza
Jörgen Fog
Gerhard Iberer
Wolfgang Härtel
Ursula Wex*
Eckart Schwarz-Schulz
Sebastian Bru*
Stefan Gartmayer

Double Bass

Herbert Mayr
Christoph Wimmer
Ödön Rácz
Wolfgang Gürtler

Jerzy (Jurek) Dybal
Alexander Matschinegg
Michael Bladerer
Bartosz Sikorski
Jan-Georg Leser
Jedrzej Gorski

Harp

Charlotte Balzereit

Flute

Wolfgang Schulz
Dieter Flury
Walter Auer
Günter Federsel
Günter Voglmayr
Wolfgang Breinschmid

Oboe

Martin Gabriel
Clemens Horak
Harald Hörth
Alexander Öhlberger
Wolfgang Plank*
Herbert Maderthaner*

Clarinet

Ernst Ottensamer
Matthias Schorn
Daniel Ottensamer*
Norbert Täubl
Johann Hindler
Andreas Wieser

Bassoon

Michael Werba
Stepan Turnovskiy
Harald Müller
Reinhard Öhlberger
Wolfgang Koblitz
Benedikt Dinkhauser

Horn

Ronald Janezic
Lars Michael Stransky
Sebastian Mayr

Wolfgang Vladar
Thomas Jöbstl
Wolfgang Lintner
Wolfgang Tomböck
Jan Jankovic*
Manuel Huber*

Trumpet

Hans-Peter Schuh
Gotthard Eder
Martin Mühlfellner
Reinhold Ambros
Stefan Haimel

Trombone

Dietmar Küblböck
Ian Bousfield
Jeremy Wilson
Mark Gaal
Karl Jeitler
Johann Ströcker

Tuba

Paul Halwax
Christoph Gigler*

Percussion

Bruno Hartl
Anton Mittermayr
Erwin Falk
Klaus Zauner
Oliver Madas
Benjamin Schmidinger
Thomas Lechner

* An asterisk denotes a confirmed member of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra who does not yet belong to the association of the Vienna Philharmonic.

History of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Origins

Until the first Philharmonic concert on March 28, 1842, the city that gave its name to the Viennese classics—works of Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Ludwig van Beethoven—had no professional concert orchestra. Concerts of symphonic works were played by ensembles specially assembled for the occasion. Orchestras composed entirely of professional musicians were found only in the theaters. The logical step of playing a concert with one of these orchestras was taken at the end of the 18th century, when Mozart engaged the orchestra of the Vienna Court Theater for a cycle of six concerts in 1785. Beethoven also engaged this ensemble on April 2, 1800, for a concert in which he premiered his first symphony. On May 24, 1824, the orchestra of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (“Society of the Friends of Music”) and the court orchestra joined forces with the court opera orchestra for the premiere of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. Despite these promising beginnings, however, the largest and finest ensemble in Vienna only managed to become an organizer of classical symphonic concerts in a very roundabout way. The Bavarian composer and conductor Franz Lachner, conductor at the court opera theater from 1830, played symphonies by Beethoven in the intervals of ballet performances. From these experiments to the court opera orchestra’s first entrepreneurial activities was only a small step, and in 1833 Lachner founded the Künstler-Verein for this purpose. However, the society disbanded after only four concerts due to organizational shortcomings.

The Birth of the Philharmonic Orchestra: Otto Nicolai

Otto Nicolai (1810–1849) was appointed conductor at the Kärntertortheater in 1841. Encouraged by influential figures of Vienna’s

musical life, he revived Lachner’s idea and on March 28, 1842, conducted a “Grand Concert” in the Großer Redoutensaal, which was presented by “all of the orchestra members of the imperial Hof-Operntheater.” This “Philharmonic Academy,” as it was originally called, is rightly regarded as the origin of the Orchestra, because all of the principles of the “Philharmonic Idea,” which still apply today, were put into practice for the first time:

1. Only a musician who plays in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra (originally the Court Opera Orchestra) can become a member of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.
2. The Orchestra is artistically, organizationally and financially autonomous, and all decisions are reached on a democratic basis during the general meeting of all members.
3. The day-to-day management is the responsibility of a democratically elected body, the administrative committee.

Thus, even before the political events of 1848, a revolutionary policy was adopted—democratic self-determination and entrepreneurial initiative undertaken by an orchestra as a partnership—which laid the foundations for technically and musically superior performances of classical symphonic works. Of course, this was only the beginning. The association of musicians would suffer serious setbacks and learn painful lessons before it finally achieved true stability.

The Philharmonic Subscription Concerts

When Otto Nicolai left Vienna permanently in 1847, the young enterprise almost collapsed, having lost in one person not only its artistic but also its administrative leader. Twelve years of stagnation followed before a new innovation brought about the long-awaited change of fortune. On January 15, 1860, the first of four subscription concerts took place in the Kärntnertheater under the baton of then opera director Carl

Eckert, and since that time, the “Philharmonic Concerts” have been staged without interruption. The only significant change in all those years was to switch from having one conductor for a complete season of subscription concerts to the present system of having various guest conductors within a season, as the following chronology demonstrates:

1860: Carl Eckert
 1860–1875: Otto Dessoff
 1875–1882: Hans Richter
 1882–1883: Wilhelm Jahn
 1883–1898: Hans Richter
 1898–1901: Gustav Mahler
 1901–1903: Joseph Hellmesberger
 1903–1908: guest conductors
 1908–1927: Felix von Weingartner
 1927–1930: Wilhelm Furtwängler
 1930–1933: Clemens Krauss
 1933–present: guest conductors

Otto Dessoff

Under the leadership of Otto Dessoff (1835–1892) the repertoire was consistently enlarged, important organizational principles (music archives, rules of procedure) were introduced and the Orchestra moved to its third new home. At the beginning of the 1870–1871 season it began playing in the newly built Goldener Saal in the Musikverein building in Vienna, which has proved to be the ideal venue, with its acoustical characteristics influencing the Orchestra’s style and sound.

The “Golden Age”: Hans Richter

Under Hans Richter, the legendary conductor of the premiere of Wagner’s tetralogy *The Ring of the Nibelungen* in Bayreuth, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra finally established itself as an ensemble of world renown and unique tradition. This was helped through its associations with Wagner, Verdi, Bruckner, Brahms, Liszt and others, all of whom performed with

the Orchestra, either as conductors or soloists. During Richter’s tenure, which has become known as the “Golden Age,” Brahms’s Second and Third Symphonies and Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony were premiered.

The Philharmonic performed abroad for the first time at the World Exhibition in Paris in 1900 with Gustav Mahler (1860–1911) conducting. The Orchestra, officially recognized by the Austrian government as an association in 1908, did not start touring with any regularity until 1922 under Felix von Weingartner, who led the Orchestra as far afield as South America.

The Philharmonic’s close relationship to Richard Strauss, of course, is of great historical importance, and represents one of the many high points in the Orchestra’s rich history.

Further musical highlights were artistic collaborations with Arturo Toscanini from 1933 to 1937 and Wilhelm Furtwängler, who, despite the departure from the one-subscription-concert conductor system, was in actuality the main conductor of the Orchestra from 1933 to 1945, and again from 1947 to 1954.

In 1938, politics encroached on the Philharmonic’s activities in the most brutal way. The National Socialists dismissed all Jewish artists from the Vienna State Opera and disbanded the association of the Vienna Philharmonic. It was only the intervention of Furtwängler that achieved the nullification of the disbandment order and saved the “half-Jews” and “closely related” from dismissal and persecution. However, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra mourned the murder of six Jewish members in the concentration camps as well as the death of a young violinist on the eastern front.

After World War II

After World War II, the Orchestra continued the policy it began in 1933 of working with every conductor of repute. Especially important to the Orchestra after 1945 were the artistic collaborations with its two honorary conductors, Karl Böhm and Herbert von Karajan, and with its honorary member, Leonard Bernstein.

Through its busy concert schedule, recordings on film and record, tours all over the world, and regular appearances at major international festivals, the Vienna Philharmonic meets all the requirements of the modern multimedia music business while still managing to emphasize its unique individuality, perhaps best exemplified in the annual New Year's Concert, and in the pivotal role it plays each summer at the Salzburg Festival. Although the Orchestra has moved with the times, it remains faithful to traditional principles by retaining its autonomy and the subscription concert series as the artistic, organizational and financial basis of its work.

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra is not only Austria's most highly coveted "cultural export," it is also an ambassador of peace, humanity and reconciliation, concepts which are inseparably linked to the message of music itself. In 2005, the Vienna Philharmonic was named Goodwill Ambassador of the World Health Organisation. For its artistic achievements, the Orchestra has received numerous awards, gold and platinum disks, national honors, and honorary membership in many cultural institutions.

Dr. Clemens Hellsberg



The Viennese sound

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra sees itself as having inherited a body of instrument types which at the end of the 18th century reflected the prevailing intellectual spirit and value system, not only of central Europe, but to a certain extent of the entire continent. The emergence of national schools of composition in various countries at the beginning of the 19th century led to variations in the way instruments were constructed. The works of the French impressionists, for example, and their underlying sound concepts required not only modified instruments but also reflected a change in the attitude behind the music, which had been dominated all over Europe, at least until the French revolution, by the idea of musical rhetoric. In Vienna, this change did not take place. Viennese music remained essentially faithful to concepts of sound originating in the Viennese classics, although there were some developments.

Viennese woodwinds and brasses

There are significant differences between Viennese woodwind and brass instruments and those of other symphony orchestras. The fingering on the clarinet is different, and the mouthpiece has a different form, which in turn requires a special kind of reed. The bassoon has essentially the same form as the German version, but with special fingering and reeds. The trumpet has a rotary valve system and, in places, a narrower bore.

The trombone has a narrower bore as well, which enables improved tone color and dynamics, as does the Viennese tuba, which also has a different valve system and fingering. The flute is largely the same as the conventional Boehm flute that is widely used all over the world. However, it did not replace the wooden flute in Vienna until the 1920s. Here, too, as with all wind and brass instruments in the Viennese classics, vibrato is used very sparingly. Up to that time, vibrato

was regarded as a form of embellishment rather than a permanent way of beautifying the note and it was reserved almost exclusively for the strings. It is interesting to note that an increasing number of international wind instrument soloists are rejecting vibrato as stylistically inappropriate in their interpretations of the Viennese classics. Of course, the Vienna Philharmonic winds use vibrato in pieces where it is intended as a element.

The greatest differences between Viennese and internationally used instruments are to be found in the Viennese horn, which has a narrow bore, an extended leadpipe and a system of piston valves. The advantage of these valves is that the individual notes are not so sharply detached, making smoother legato playing possible. Viennese horns are also constructed of stronger materials than conventional double horns.

The Viennese oboe, played only in Vienna, differs from the internationally played French oboe in that it has a special bore shape, a special reed and special fingering.

With the exception of the flute and, to some extent, the bassoon, the typical differences in tone of Viennese instruments can be described as follows: They are richer in overtones, i.e., the sound tone is brighter. They have a wider dynamic range, thus making possible greater differences between *piano* and *forte*. They enable greater modulation of sound: The musician can alter the tone color in many ways.

The way an orchestra sounds is a result of tradition and the concepts of sound arising therefrom. The roots of the Viennese brass tradition are to be found in Germany. Hans Richter played a vital role in the development of this tradition. Because of him, a great many Vienna Philharmonic brass players have been invited to play at the Bayreuth Festival, and numerous German brass players, mainly trombone and tuba players, have been engaged to play in Vienna.

Viennese percussion

Viennese percussion has the following unusual features: The skin of all the membraned instruments is genuine goat parchment, which gives a richer range of overtones than artificial skins. The adjustable kettle of the Viennese timpani is pressed against the skin. The manually operated tuning screws allow greater tuning accuracy compared to instruments that are tuned with foot pedals. Of the various types of drum, preference is given to those which have a cylinder with no draw-bar/tie-rod mounting and can thus vibrate freely. Since these instruments developed from clapperless handbells, they are cast and not made of sheet metal like today's instruments. The tonal differences between these and instruments used internationally can be measured and charted using digital analysis.

Viennese strings

In the field of the Viennese strings, which are justly famous for their sound, in-depth studies have yet to be carried out. Although there is a clearly perceptible continual development, there is no fully standardized Viennese violin school. There can be no doubt that the Viennese string instruments themselves, unlike the winds, are not of prime importance in producing the orchestra's unique sound. With a few exceptions, the quality of the instruments of the string section is not particularly outstanding. More important is that the string section of the Vienna Philharmonic is more like a workshop in the Middle Ages, in which newly arrived musicians are initiated into and absorb the secrets of the orchestra's special musical style.

Thus, an orchestral sound is created which essentially corresponds to that which the great composers of the Viennese classics, Viennese Romanticism and the Second Viennese School intended when they were writing their works.



Terry Linke

THERE IS PERHAPS no other musical ensemble more consistently and closely associated with the history and tradition of European classical music than the **Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra**. In the course of its 168-year history, the musicians of this most prominent orchestra of the capital city of music have been an integral part of a musical epoch that—thanks to an abundance of uniquely gifted composers and interpreters—must certainly be regarded as unique.

The Orchestra's close association with this rich musical history is best illustrated by the statements of countless pre-eminent musical personalities of the past. Richard Wagner described the orchestra as being one of the most outstanding in the world; Anton Bruckner called it "the most superior musical association"; Johannes Brahms counted himself a "friend and admirer"; Gustav Mahler claimed to be joined together through "the bonds of musical art"; and Richard Strauss summarized these sentiments by saying, "All praise of the Vienna Philharmonic reveals itself as understatement."

When Hans Knappertsbusch said that the Philharmonic was "incomparable," his comment

was correct in more ways than one. One notable aspect of this incomparability is certainly the unique relationship between the Vienna State Opera Orchestra and the private association known as the Vienna Philharmonic. In accordance with Philharmonic statutes, only a member of the Vienna State Opera Orchestra can become a member of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra. Before joining the Philharmonic, therefore, one must first successfully audition for a position with the State Opera Orchestra and prove oneself capable over a period of three years before becoming eligible to submit an application for membership in the association of the Vienna Philharmonic. The engagement in the Vienna State Opera Orchestra provides the musicians a financial stability that would be impossible to attain without relinquishing their autonomy to private or corporate sponsors. The independence that the Philharmonic musicians enjoy through the opera is returned in kind by a higher level of artistic performance gained through the Orchestra's experience on the concert podium.

Since its inception through Otto Nicolai in 1842, the fascination that the Orchestra has

exercised upon prominent composers and conductors, as well as on audiences all over the world, is based not only on a homogenous musical style carefully bequeathed from one generation to the next, but also on its unique structure and history. The desire to provide artistically worthy performances of the symphonic works of Mozart and Beethoven in their own city led to the decision on the part of the court opera musicians to present a “Philharmonic” concert series independent of their work at the opera, and upon their own responsibility and risk. The organizational form chosen for this new enterprise was democracy, a concept that in the political arena was the subject of bloody battles only six years later.

Over the course of one-and-a-half centuries, this chosen path of democratic self-administration has experienced slight modifications, but has never been substantially altered. The foremost ruling body of the organization is the Orchestra itself.

The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra has made it its mission to communicate the humanitarian message of music into the daily lives and consciousness of its listeners. With concerts at home and on tour around the world, today’s Vienna Philharmonic is much more than Austria’s most coveted “cultural export.” The Orchestra’s members are considered ambassadors, expressing through their performances the ideals of peace, humanity and reconciliation with which music is so inseparably bound, and regularly donating services to create events that promote peace through music. Examples of this include the Orchestra’s historic performance of Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with Sir Simon Rattle in 2000 at Mauthausen, the former site of Austria’s largest concentration camp during World War II; the 2002 concert in New York City’s St. Patrick’s Cathedral in remembrance of victims of terrorism; annual benefits in New York benefiting the American Austrian Foundation/Salzburg Cornell (Medical Seminars); and, beginning in 1999, the annual donation of partial proceeds from the Philharmonic’s New Year’s Concerts to a variety of humanitarian organizations. Since 2005, the Vienna Philharmonic

has been a Goodwill Ambassador for the World Health Organisation, and in 2006 the Orchestra became a supporter of the “Hear the World” initiative, a hearing awareness campaign. As of November 2008, Rolex is the worldwide presenting sponsor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.

The musicians of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra endeavor to implement the motto with which Ludwig van Beethoven, whose symphonic works served as a catalyst for the creation of the Orchestra, prefaced his *Missa solemnis*: “From the heart, to the heart.”



Semyon Bychkov has served as Chief Conductor of the WDR Symphony Orchestra in Cologne for 13 years. This season, Maestro Bychkov conducts tours to Asia, the United States and Europe with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and Filarmonica della Scala, relishing prolonged periods with old colleagues, as well as an increased presence in the United States, where he was based for ten years after leaving the former Soviet Union.

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Opening the 2010–2011 season in Milan, where he established his reputation with performances of *Tosca* and *Elektra*, Maestro Bychkov conducted the Filarmonica della Scala for the first of four concerts in Italy before leaving for China with concerts in Beijing and Shanghai. Returning from Asia, Maestro Bychkov crossed to the United States, where he conducted the orchestras of Cleveland, San Francisco and Philadelphia before landing in London, where he spent the final weeks of 2010 conducting a new production of *Tannhäuser* at Covent Garden.

Tannhäuser is the second opera by Wagner and sixth opera that Maestro Bychkov has conducted at the Royal Opera House since making his debut at Covent Garden with *Elektra* in 2003.

His performances of *Lohengrin* in 2009 were a highlight of the season. His recording of the opera for Profil was released in 2009 shortly before the Covent Garden production opened, and it later won two *BBC Music Magazine Awards*: Opera of the Year and Disc of the Year 2010.

Maestro Bychkov begins 2011 with back-to-back European tours: first in Amsterdam and Spain with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and later with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in Vienna, Cologne and on the West Coast of the United States. Programs for the concerts feature the second symphonies of Brahms, Schumann and Schubert, as well as works by Wagner, Bartók, Beethoven and Mahler’s Symphony No. 6.

Maestro Bychkov has worked with the Vienna Philharmonic on many occasions: at the Vienna State Opera, where he conducted *Elektra*, *Tristan und Isolde*, *Daphne* and *Lohengrin*; and at the Salzburg Festival, where he conducted *Der Rosenkavalier*. He first worked with the orchestra in symphonic repertoire in a performance of Bach’s B minor Mass in 2002, and was subsequently invited to the Salzburg Festival. In 2008, Maestro Bychkov conducted the Orchestra in Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 for the opening of the Wiener Festwochen.

Following this U.S. tour, Maestro Bychkov returns to Europe for concerts with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic Orchestra, Leipzig Gewandhaus and RAI Torino, and a concert tour with the Filarmonica della Scala to Italy, Spain, Germany and Greece. While in Italy, Maestro Bychkov will conduct performances of Britten’s *War Requiem* with the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia in Rome and Maggio Musicale in Florence, with a further performance at the Festival de Saint Denis in Paris. His final concert of the 2010–2011 season is at the Schleswig-Holstein Festival, where he will conduct the NDR Symphony Orchestra.

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