

Sunday, March 23, 2024, 3pm
Zellerbach Hall

Mahler Chamber Orchestra
Mitsuko Uchida, *piano and director*
José Maria Blumenschein, *concertmaster and leader*

PROGRAM

Wolfgang Amadeus MOZART (1756–1791) Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-flat major,
K. 456 (1784)
Allegro vivace
Andante un poco sostenuto
Allegro vivace

Leoš JANÁČEK (1854–1928) *Mládí* for Wind Sextet (1924)
Allegro
Andante sostenuto
Vivace
Allegro animato

INTERMISSION

MOZART Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major,
K. 467 (1785)
Allegro maestoso
Andante
Allegro vivace assai

This performance is dedicated to the memory of Alex Pines.

Leadership support for this performance is provided by Nadine Tang.

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Above: Mahler Chamber Orchestra with Mitsuko Uchida. Photo by Geoffroy Schied.
Below: Mahler Chamber Orchestra. Photo by Molina Visuals.



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Piano Concerto No. 18 in B-flat major,
K. 456

“Mozart essentially invented the classical piano concerto and then elaborated the concerto’s potentialities of form and expression in a series of highly individual masterpieces. He unveiled a universe and then devoted himself to populating it with the most diverse creations.”

—*Maynard Solomon in Mozart: A Life*

Mozart and Beethoven scholar Maynard Solomon here eloquently sums up Mozart’s extraordinary contribution to the development of the piano concerto, epitomized by the 12 keyboard masterpieces he wrote in quick succession between 1784 and 1786. (In total, he would compose 27 piano concertos.) The impetus for such an outpouring of genius in a specific musical genre was the composer’s immense popularity as a keyboard soloist in Vienna during the middle of the 1780s. But with these works, he went far beyond creating vehicles simply to display his own virtuosity. Instead, he used them to explore different sides of his temperament and artistry. And he was as much concerned with the orchestra’s role in a concerto as the pianist’s: relishing the interplay between *tutti* and solo in the musical argument. Especially, he loved to exploit the colorful sonorities of the woodwind instruments.

On this program, we will hear two concertos, one very popular and the other too rarely heard. The Piano Concerto No. 21 is indeed a favorite with pianists and audiences, but, unaccountably, Concerto No. 18 in B-flat major is a work that receives far less attention. Perhaps this is because of its mostly gentle, lyrical style and its lack of dramatic conflict. However, its *Andante* is one of Mozart’s most beautiful and affecting slow movements, one well worth discovering.

No. 18 was composed for the extraordinarily talented pianist Maria Theresia von Paradis, who, despite being blind, was a sought-after soloist throughout Europe. Becoming a personal friend of the Mozart family, she naturally requested that Mozart write a concerto for her to play at her upcoming concerts in Paris; he obliged with this lovely, rather feminine work in September 1784. His father, Leopold, wrote about his son’s performance of the work at the Vienna Burgtheater before Emperor Joseph II in February 1785. Calling it a “magnificent concerto,” he recalled that he was so overcome “by hearing the interplay of the instruments. . . that tears came into my eyes for sheer delight.” He also noted that the Emperor rose to his feet, crying “Bravo, Mozart!” and doffing his hat to him.

A spirited, optimistic march, the first movement opens with the strings softly introducing a repeated-note fanfare motive, which is immediately repeated in higher range by the woodwinds. This establishes an equality between strings and winds that will characterize this concerto throughout. The strings resume their fleshing out of the principal subject, which has many components to be broken apart and developed long before the development section proper arrives.

All seems to be rolling along smoothly until a sudden pause just before we expect to hear the second subject. Instead, the strings “with a kind of cushioned shudder” (Michael Steinberg) suddenly introduces a chord of E-flat minor, and a darkly haunting interlude in B-flat minor follows. Bravely, the two oboes move the music back to major and introduce the birdlike second subject. Thus another important element of this concerto has announced itself: the tussle between major and minor modes that will keep the music from becoming too safe and predictable.

The jewel of this concerto is the slow second movement in G minor, which is theme-and-variations writing of sublime

beauty and sadness. Strings introduce the sighing theme with its memorable pattern of three repeated notes that sink downward with the fourth note. This eloquent theme is in two sections, each repeated. And as Steinberg explains, beginning with the second variation, Mozart also varies the repeats, “so that the five variations actually turn out to offer nine different transformations of the theme.” The third and fourth variations present a striking contrast with each other. In the first of these, the orchestra breaks away from the gentle mood with strident *fortes* and angry dissonances. This rebellious music is quelled with the fourth variation’s surprise move to G major, and a soothing pastoral dialogue between woodwinds and the piano. A superb coda muses sorrowfully over the theme’s opening motive.

Again taking up the repeated-notes motive that has pervaded this concerto, the pianist launches a jaunty finale in the traditional rondo-sonata form and a bouncing 6/8 rhythm. This is the pianist’s moment to shine with keyboard brilliance, accentuated with wit. But if we think we can sit back and smile, the composer has another of his surprises in store late in the movement. A pause resets the meter to 2/4 and pushes the home key out of the way. For a few moments, turbulence reigns as the music explores distant minor keys. Topping this, the pianist decides to stick with the original 6/8 meter against the orchestra’s 2/4. Then, as if nothing has happened, the rondo returns and restores order for a vivacious finish.

Leoš Janáček

Mládí for Wind Sextet

No other composer had a career path quite like Leoš Janáček’s. Born to a poor family of musician/teachers in Moravia, he worked for decades in diligent obscurity as a teacher and conductor in the region’s capital, Brno. The greatest period of his creativity came after his 60th birthday, during the 12 years after his opera *Jenůfa* finally

had its triumphant premiere in Prague in 1916. During that extraordinary decade, Janáček wrote his two string quartets, the *Sinfonietta*, and his finest operas *Káťa Kabanová*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *The Makropoulos Affair*, and *From the House of the Dead*—most of the works for which he is renowned today.

The wind sextet *Mládí* (“Youth”) was yet another chamber work that came from this miraculous final period. He wrote it to celebrate his 70th birthday, and those who knew him described the composer as extraordinarily youthful and full of vitality at that age. Much of the secret of this vitality was due to his passionate but platonic love affair with Kamila Stosslová, which was largely conducted through letters. Only half his age, she became his muse and inspiration.

Preparing to collaborate on a biography at this time, Janáček began collecting memories of his youth, part of it spent as a student at Brno’s Augustinian monastery. These reminiscences prompted *Mládí*, which is indeed as fresh and youthful as its title suggests. Written during the summer of 1924, *Mládí* was scored for a bright-toned ensemble of flute (sometimes doubling piccolo), oboe, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, and horn.

All of Janáček’s music, whether vocal or instrumental, sprang from the rhythms of the Czech language he loved deeply. And thus, the Allegro first movement is built around a little downward-sighing theme announced at the very beginning by the oboe; it sets the Czech words “*Mládí, zlaté mládí*” (“Youth, golden youth”). This idea keeps returning between episodes of contrasting music in the minor mode and often faster tempos. The conclusion of the movement is a high-speed romp joyously recalling this theme over and over.

The bassoon introduces a nostalgic, slightly melancholic theme for the Andante sostenuto second movement, which is treated to a variations process and also in-

errupted by a fast, playful interlude. The nostalgic theme, however, has the last word, rounded off by a sigh from the flute and mutters of agreement from the bassoon.

Immediately before writing *Mládí*, Janáček had written a little march for piccolo, bells, and piano or tambourine, which he called the “March of the Bluebirds.” “Bluebirds” referred to the nickname of the Brno monastery boys, Janáček once among them, who wore blue coats and marched to a little whistling song. The third-movement scherzo features the shrill voice of the piccolo imitating the whistling. Two slower and tenderly melodic interludes briefly interrupt the march.

Reminiscences of the “Youth, golden youth” theme open the Allegro animato finale. Eventually, a bolder theme emerges, led by the horn. Janáček’s development of his “Youth” theme is stunningly imaginative throughout, as is his exploitation of all the members of his ensemble, juxtaposing their distinctive color characteristics. The close is a fast, brilliant salute to the “Youth” theme.

Mozart

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467

Even before Swedish director Bo Widerberg made its slow movement the theme music of his romantic film *Elvira Madigan* in 1967, Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major was one of his most popular concertos. But when it was premiered on March 10, 1785, the composer’s father, Leopold, was so alarmed by its dissonance that he thought the overworked copyist must have made an unusual number of mistakes. After all, his son was notorious for barely meeting his deadlines and had just completed the score

the day before the premiere. But the notes were correct. In the sublime slow movement, Mozart demonstrated what the poet Baudelaire put into words a century later: “The Beautiful is always strange.”

This second movement is a soaring aria sung by pianist and orchestra, always hushed and breathing a nocturnal, dreamlike atmosphere. The orchestration is exquisite: muted strings magically blended with poignant woodwinds. But listen closely: in this song without words, soothing consonances constantly tumble into dissonances. Its harmonies always yearn toward keys far from the home key of F major. And its gentle flow is troubled by a nervous accompaniment.

Of course, this concerto also has two other movements, and the first especially matches the slow movement’s greatness. Expansive and leisurely, it is a remarkably subtle military march, with its stealthy opening “a tiptoed march in stocking feet” (the venerable Cuthbert Girdlestone). Listen for the charming gesture of oboe, bassoon, and flute gently beckoning the pianist onto the stage for her first solo.

The finale is a comic-opera rondo with a sly refrain and merrily mischievous contributions from the woodwinds. Here Mozart wakes his audience from the yearning dream of his slow movement and sends them home smiling.

—Janet E. Bedell © 2025

Janet E. Bedell is a program annotator and feature writer who writes for Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Caramoor Festival of the Arts, and other musical organizations.

Since its founding in 1997, the **Mahler Chamber Orchestra** (MCO) has established itself as one of the world's leading chamber orchestras. Working as a "global collective," the MCO is led by its members in collaboration with its Berlin-based management office. The musicians, who come from around 25 different countries, unite for each tour or project. The chamber music dialogue and unanimous act of listening shape the orchestra's sound; it's a philosophy inspired by the group's founding mentor Claudio Abbado that the MCO calls "the sound of listening."

Last season, the MCO performed with conductors Sir Simon Rattle, Maxim Emelyanychev, Tugan Sokhiev, Anja Bihlmaier, and with its Artistic Advisor Daniele Gatti, among others. The MCO is also known for its performances without a conductor; our Artistic Partners Yuja Wang and Mitsuko Uchida, with whom the orchestra goes on tour several times a year, often lead the MCO from the piano. During the 2024–25, season, the MCO joins the stage with Antonello Manacorda, Gianandrea Noseda, Elim Chan, Raphaël Pichon, and again with Maxim Emelyanychev, as well as with soloists Augustin Hadelich and Stéphane Degout.

The orchestra maintains residencies in Berlin, Salzburg, and Lucerne; from 2026, it will succeed the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra at the Baden-Baden Easter Festival. In 2024, the MCO assumed the role of Artistic Director of Musikwoche Hitzacker, where it presents a diverse repertoire characterized by chamber music every year. In March 2025, pianist Leif Ove Andsnes, a longtime friend and collaborator of the MCO, will be the festival's artist in residence.

The MCO is committed to enriching lives through music and actively creates on-and-off-stage encounters that bring music, learning, and creativity to communities across the globe. Its *Feel the Music* program introduces music to deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, while the MCO Academy allows

orchestra members to share their expertise with the next generation of musicians. Additionally, the MCO's school concerts invite students on a multicultural journey, fostering introspection and contemplation on the theme of "Belonging."

The orchestra's performances are often recorded and aired by major broadcasters and on ARTE; the ensemble's most recent CD featuring the opera *picture a day like this* was released by Nimbus in September 2024. Together with Artistic Partner for Immersive Experiences Henrik Oppermann/Schallgeber, the MCO has developed a series of XR (Extended Reality) concert formats. Since July 2024, some of the chamber music pieces produced in XR have been available in the Mahler Chamber Orchestra app for Apple Vision Pro.

One of the most revered artists of our time, **Mitsuko Uchida** (*piano*) is known as a peerless interpreter of the works of Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, and Beethoven, as well as for being a devotee of the piano music of Alban Berg, Arnold Schoenberg, Anton Webern, and György Kurtág. She was *Musical America's* Artist of the Year in 2022 and Music Director of the 2024 Ojai Music Festival, and is a Carnegie Hall Perspectives artist across the 2022–23, 2023–24, and 2024–25 seasons. Her latest solo recording, of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*, was released to critical acclaim in 2022, was nominated for a Grammy Award, and won the 2022 *Gramophone* Piano Award.

Uchida has enjoyed close relationships over many years with the world's most renowned orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, London Symphony Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, and—in the US—the Chicago Symphony and the Cleveland Orchestra, with whom she recently celebrated her 100th performance at Severance Hall. Conductors with whom she has worked

closely have included Bernard Haitink, Sir Simon Rattle, Riccardo Muti, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Jurowski, Andris Nelsons, Gustavo Dudamel, and Mariss Jansons.

Since 2016, Uchida has been an Artistic Partner of the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, with whom she is currently engaged on a multi-season touring project in Europe, Japan and North America. She also appears regularly in recital in Vienna, Berlin, Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York, and Tokyo, and is a frequent guest at the Salzburg Mozartwoche and Salzburg Festival.

Uchida records exclusively for Decca, and her multi-award-winning discography includes the complete Mozart and Schubert piano sonatas. She is the recipient of two Grammy Awards—for Mozart Concertos with the Cleveland Orchestra, and for an album of lieder with Dorothea Röschmann—and her recording of the Schoenberg Piano Concerto with Pierre Boulez and the Cleveland Orchestra won the *Gramophone* Award for Best Concerto.

A founding member of the Borletti-Buitoni Trust and Director of the Marlboro Music Festival, Uchida is a recipient of the Golden Mozart Medal from the Salzburg Mozarteum and the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. She has also been awarded the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society and the Wigmore Hall Medal, and holds honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In 2009, she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.



José Franck-Baltester

José Maria Blumenschein (*concertmaster and leader*), a native of Freiburg (Germany), was born of Brazilian parents and currently serves as first concertmaster of

the WDR Radio Symphony Orchestra in Cologne, after having been Associate Concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra for three seasons. During this time with the WDR, he also took two seasons off to perform as first concertmaster of the Vienna State Opera and Philharmonic.

As a passionate leader, Blumenschein regularly performs with many orchestras and ensembles, including the Mahler Chamber Orchestra, Bayreuth Festival Orchestra, Chamber Orchestra of Europe, London Symphony Orchestra, Bayerische Staatsoper, Dresden Staatskapelle, NDR and Radio Orchestra.

Blumenschein is also a founding member of Kammermusik Köln, a chamber music series in Cologne founded by members of WDR Radio, Gürzenich Orchestra and Cologne Conservatory members to be the city's first all-year chamber music series.

Born in 1985, Blumenschein received his first violin lesson at the age of four in Freiburg, Germany, at the Pflüger Institute for Highly Gifted Children. In 1990, he began studies with Vesra Kramarowa in Mannheim. In 2001, Blumenschein was accepted to the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied with conductor and violinist Joseph Silverstein and served as concertmaster of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra.

Blumenschein has been performing with the Mahler Orchestra for almost two decades. Since 2023, he has shared the MCO's concertmaster position with Matthew Truscott.

Mahler Chamber Orchestra

VIOLIN I

José Maria Blumenschein* (Germany)
May Kunstovny (Austria)
Hildegard Niebuhr-Candan (Germany)
Alexandra Preucil (USA)
John Timothy Summers (USA)
Annette zu Castell-Ruedenhausen
(Germany)
Nicola Bruzzo (Italy)
Hwa-Won Rimmer Pyun (Germany)

VIOLIN II

Anna Maria Malm** (Austria)
Mette Tjaerby Korneliusen (Denmark)
Michiel Commandeur (Netherlands)
Christian Heubes (Germany)
Stephanie Baubin (Austria)
Katarzyna Wozniakowska (Poland)
Paulien Holthuis (Netherlands)

VIOLA

Joel Hunter** (Great Britain)
Yannick Dondelinger (Great Britain)
Mladen Somborac (Germany)
Anna Maria Wunsch (Germany)
Frida Siegrist Oliver (Norway/Switzerland)

CELLO

Philipp von Steinaecker** (Germany)
Stefan Faludi (Germany)
Jakob Stepp (Germany)
Moritz Weigert (Germany)

DOUBLE BASS

Christoph Anacker** (Germany)
Johane Gonzalez Seijas (Spain)
Jon Mikel Martínez Valgañón (Spain)

FLUTE

Chiara Tonelli (Italy)

OBOE

Mizuho Yoshii (Japan)
Jesús Pinillos Rivera (Spain)

BASSOON

Mathis Stier (Germany)
Chiara Santi (Italy)

HORN

Jose Vicente Castelló (Spain)
Jonathan Wegloop (Netherlands)

TRUMPET

Christopher Dicken (Great Britain)
Florian Kirner (Germany)

TIMPANI & PERCUSSION

Martin Piechotta (Germany)

* Concertmaster

** Section Leader