Mahler’s Symphony No. 3

Carlos Kalmar, conductor
Susan Platts, mezzo-soprano
Women of the Portland State Chamber Choir and Vox Femina
Ethan Sperry, music director
Pacific Youth Choir
Mia Hall Miller, music director

GUSTAV MAHLER
Symphony No. 3 in D minor
Part I
Introduction—Forcefully and decisively
Part II
Tempo di menuetto—Moderately—Commodo—
Scherzando—Unhurriedly—Very slow—
Mysteriously—Joyous in tempo and jaunty
in expression—Slow—Calm—Deeply felt
Susan Platts
Women of the Portland State Chamber Choir and Vox Femina
Pacific Youth Choir

THE CONCERT CONVERSATION,
conducted one hour before each performance, will feature Music Director Carlos Kalmar and Robert McBride, host for the stations of All Classical Portland. You can also enjoy the Concert Conversation in the comfort of your own home. Visit the website allclassical.org to watch the video on demand.

Sponsored by Pat Zimmerman & Paul Dinu

Saturday, May 21, 2016, 7:30 pm
Monday, May 23, 2016, 8 pm
Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall
SUSAN PLATTS

British-born Canadian mezzo-soprano Susan Platts brings a uniquely rich and wide-ranging voice to concert and recital repertoire for alto and mezzo-soprano. She is particularly esteemed for her performances of Gustav Mahler’s works.

In May of 2004, as part of the Rolex Mentor and Protege Arts Initiative, world-renowned soprano Jessye Norman chose Ms. Platts as her protegée from 26 international candidates, and she has continued to mentor her ever since.

Ms. Platts has performed at Royal Albert Hall, Teatro alla Scala, Teatro di San Carlo, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center, as well as with the Philadelphia, Cleveland and Minnesota orchestras, Orchestre de Paris, BBC Symphony Orchestra, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Montreal, Toronto, American, Detroit, Milwaukee, Baltimore, and Houston symphonies, Les Violons du Roy, Boston’s Handel and Haydn Society, as well as the Los Angeles and St. Paul chamber orchestras.

She has collaborated with many of today’s leading conductors, including Marin Alsop, Roberto Abbado, Sir Andrew Davis, Ludovic Morlot, Leon Botstein, Andreas Delfs, John Adams, Christoph Eschenbach, Jane Glover, Jeffrey Kahane, Bernard Labadie, Keith Lockhart, Kent Nagano, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Sir Roger Norrington, Peter Oundjian, Itzhak Perlman, Bramwell Tovey, Osmo Vänska, and Pinchas Zukerman. Ms. Platts has appeared in venues across the country and around the world. The Chamber Choir of Portland State University, as well as with the Oregon Symphony and their music director Carlos Kalmar, has given her first prize in the American Choral Directors Association’s National ACDA Competition for Choral Singing in Gorizia, Italy, where they became the first American choir ever to win the Grand Prize in the competition’s 52-year history. The Chamber Choir’s 2012 CD A Drop in the Ocean was favorably reviewed and featured in both Fanfare and Stereophile magazines, and was a finalist for the 2012 American Prize in Choral Music. Their latest CD, Into Unknown Worlds, was named a “Recording to Die For” by Stereophile magazine. It was the first ever student recording to receive this distinction and was a finalist for the 2014 CARA Award for Best Classical Album. Recordings are available at iTunes, Amazon, CD Baby, and at our concerts. In December 2015, the Chamber Choir was honored to perform Handel’s Messiah with the Oregon Symphony under the baton of Carlos Kalmar.

PACIFIC YOUTH CHOIR

Founded in 2003 by Artistic Director Mia Hall Miller, PYC has in its short history established a reputation for quality that has led to continuing collaborations with Oregon’s top musical organizations, including the Oregon Symphony, Oregon Ballet Theatre, Pink Martini, Portland Youth Philharmonic, Eugene Symphony, Whitebird Dance, Portland Chamber Orchestra, and Trinity Choir. The choir is made up of 280 singers in 11 different choirs serving singers ages 5 to 19 from all over the Portland Metropolitan area.

PYC enjoys regional and national recognition. The choir performed four times in six years for the American Choral Directors Association’s regional and national conferences. In 2009, PYC was invited to work with Chanticleer for their National Youth Choral Festival in San Francisco, leading to continual opportunities to work with Matt Olman, former artistic director of Chanticleer. The choir appears with Pink Martini and is featured on four of their recent albums, including Joy to The World (gold award).

The choir’s programming embraces musical education and performance. It challenges singers with pieces that force students to work hard and expand, including a number of world premiers. More information is available at pacificyouthchoir.org.
GUSTAV MAHLER
Symphony No. 3 in D minor (1906 revision)

THE VITAL STATS
COMPOSER: Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, [now Kaliště, Jihlava, in the Czech Republic], Bohemia; died May 18, 1911, Vienna.
WORLD PREMIERE: Mahler conducted the first complete performance, with contralto Luise Geller-Wolter, at the Festival of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein at Krefeld on June 9, 1902.
MOST RECENT OREGON SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE: June 3, 2003; James DePreist, conductor.
INSTRUMENTATION: SATB chorus, youth choir, mezzo-soprano, 4 flutes (all doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (one doubling English horn), 5 clarinets (2 doubling E-flat clarinet and one doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), 8 horns, posthorn (offstage), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, glockenspiel, rute, snare drum, tambourine, triangle, 2 harps, and strings.
ESTIMATED DURATION: 92 minutes

“My symphony will be something the like of which the world has never yet heard! In it all of nature finds a voice.”
—Gustav Mahler

Perhaps no other composer wrestled more with the concept of program music than did Gustav Mahler. When Mahler began composing his third symphony, he was initially inspired, according to scholar Constantin Floros, by “a tiered arrangement of creation (plant world, animal world, human world, and angel world).” Accordingly, Mahler mapped out an outline featuring multiple movements, each with its own title reflecting this cosmic hierarchy. As the music took shape, Mahler’s concept of the symphony grew and changed; he made and discarded seven different scenarios for the symphony’s movements and eventually settled on this format:

First Part:
Pan Awakes. Summer Comes Marching In (Bacchic procession)

Second Part:
What the Flowers in the Meadow Tell Me
What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me
What Humanity Tells Me
What the Angels Tell Me
What Love Tells Me

However, by the time the Third premiered, in 1902, Mahler removed all explanations of the music from the score, including the movement titles. “Beginning with Beethoven, there is no modern music without its underlying program,” Mahler wrote to critic Max Kalbeck. “But no music is worth anything if you first have to tell the listener what experience lies behind it, respectively, what he is supposed to experience in it.—And so yet again: perret [perish] every program!—You just have to bring along ears and a heart and—not least—willingly surrender to the rhapsodist. Some residue of mystery always remains, even for the creator.” At the same time, Mahler recognized that listeners would instinctively fashion their own “program” or interpretation of what they heard. As he wrote to conductor Josef Krug-Waldsee, “These titles … will surely say something to you after you know the score. You will draw intimations from them about how I imagined the steady intensification of feeling, from the indistinct, unbending, elemental existence (of the forces of nature) to the tender formation of the human heart, which in turn points toward and reaches a region beyond itself (God). Please express that in your own words, without quoting those extremely inadequate titles, and that way you will have acted in my spirit.”

Although he dispensed with the movement titles, Mahler retained the overall two-part structure of the Third Symphony. Part I consists solely of the first movement, one of the largest single movements in the orchestral repertoire (it lasts approximately 30 minutes). Mahler’s penchant for heroic horn themes declares itself in the opening melody (the score calls for eight horns), which combines a simple design with a vigorous, militaristic quality. A series of marches, interspersed with delicate interludes, follows; the music seems to do battle with itself, darkness combattting light.

The movements of Part II are correspondingly shorter and less abstract, like a series of character pieces. The graceful minuet presents delicate melodies for strings punctuated by energetic, almost breathless bursts of agitation that hint at ominous portents below the surface of this seemingly delightful dance. An orchestral version of the song “Ablösung im Sommer” (Relief in summer), from Des Knaben Wunderhorn follows, in the form of a scherzo. Although Mahler had abandoned this movement’s original title, “What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me,” we can clearly hear birds and animals cavorting through the hot, languid days of summer. A solo posthorn, heard from offstage, heralds Part’s arrival.

In the fourth movement, which Mahler originally titled, “What Humanity Tells Me,” a contralto sings the Midight Song from Friedrich Nietzsche’s philosophi-
The text from Friedrich Nietzsche's Also Sprach Zarathustra describes the great pain and even greater joy of the world, a joy seeking eternal expression. Mahler's accompaniment has a near-motionless quality, as of deep water flowing almost imperceptibly. Mahler segues immediately into the next movement, for contralto and both women's and children's choruses. This song, unlike many of the Wunderhorn texts, has a religious theme. Three angels rejoice in the redemption of Peter through Jesus, and that through Jesus, and to all mankind for eternal bliss. The angelic chorus rings with merriment, as the soloist intones Peter's confession of sin.

The tempo markings for the closing Adagio serve as the most complete description of the music: slow, calm, deeply felt. Mahler's original title for this movement, "What Love Tells Me," refers to agape, a Christian concept of the highest form of love, the reciprocal love of God and humanity, and Mahler's use of the strings to slowly swell and build upon all that has come before conveys this eternal, changeless love in a profound manner.

Critics responded to the Third Symphony with a wide spectrum of opinions. Scholar Peter Franklin sums up the reviews: "On the positive side, we read of the exciting new work of an original genius, a prodigious, absolute master of the orchestra, who writes in a 'clear and intelligible' language, with 'modesty … and naivety.' The 'utterly serious' work is described as … achieving a 'glorious victory for the composer. On the negative side, we read of the stupefying and disconcerting first movement, banality, a lack of melodic invention and originality, linked to eclecticism and an absence of any sense of 'inner necessity' about the music. It included 'bizarre and trivial elements,' atrocious cacophony, 'incomprehensible platitudes' and rudely garish sounds which added up to chaos, even the order of the movements seeming arbitrary.'

When Arnold Schoenberg first heard Mahler's Third Symphony in Vienna, he wrote to Mahler, "I felt the struggle for illusions; I felt the pain of one disillusioned; I saw the forces of evil and good contending; I saw a man in a torment of emotion exerting himself to gain inner harmony. I sensed a human being, a drama, truth, the most ruthless truth!"