

# MAHLER'S SEVENTH SYMPHONY

SATURDAY, MAY 19, 2018, 7:30 PM

SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2018, 7:30 PM

MONDAY, MAY 21, 2018, 7:30 PM

SPONSORED BY

**Pat Zimmerman & Paul Dinu**

**Carlos Kalmar**, conductor

**Gustav Mahler** Symphony No. 7 in E Minor  
*Slow (Adagio)—Allegro con fuoco (flowing, but not fast)*  
*Night Music: Allegro moderato*  
*Scherzo: Spectral (flowing, but not fast)*  
*Night Music: Andante amoroso*  
*Rondo-Finale: Allegro ordinario—Allegro moderato ma energico*

ARLENE SCHNITZER CONCERT HALL

## CONCERT CONVERSATION

Conducted one hour before each performance, the Concert Conversation will feature Carlos Kalmar, music director, and Robert McBride, host. You can also enjoy the Concert Conversation in the comfort of your own home. Visit [allclassical.org](http://allclassical.org) to watch the video on demand.

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## Program Notes

### GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 7 in E Minor

### THE VITAL STATS

**COMPOSER:** Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia (now Kaliště, Jihlava in the Czech Republic); died May 18, 1911, Vienna

**WORK COMPOSED:** During the summers of 1904 and 1905

**WORLD PREMIERE:** Mahler led the first performance on September 19, 1908, in Prague.

### MOST RECENT OREGON

**SYMPHONY PERFORMANCE:** May 22, 2006; Carlos Kalmar, conductor

**INSTRUMENTATION:** Piccolo, 4 flutes, (1 doubling second piccolo), 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, horns, tenor horn, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cowbells, cymbals, glockenspiel, rute, tambourine, tam-tam, triangle, tubular bells, 2 harps, mandolin, guitar, and strings

**ESTIMATED DURATION:** 84 minutes

A composer who made his living on the conductor's podium, Gustav Mahler maintained a grueling concert schedule for nine months of the year. His position as conductor of the Vienna Court Opera, coupled with his guest conducting engagements outside Vienna, took their toll on his health and creative energy. This demanding, relentless schedule of performances, plus travel to other cities and countries for guest appearances, left Mahler depleted, with neither time nor energy to compose his own music during the concert season. In the summers, free from theatrical engagements, Mahler retreated to the Austrian countryside, where he devoted himself to composition.

The five movements of the Seventh Symphony were conceived separately;

Mahler wrote the second and fourth sections, which he called *Nachtmusik* (night music), in the summer of 1904, and completed the other three in 1905. In a 1910 letter to his wife Alma, Mahler described the paralyzing writer's block he endured in the summer of 1905, as he grappled with Symphony No. 7. "[In the summer of 1905] I had intended to complete the Seventh, for which both Andantes were done," Mahler recalled. "For two weeks I tortured myself to the point of melancholy, as you must remember, until I ran off to the Dolomites . . . finally I gave up and went home, convinced that the summer would be wasted . . . I stepped into the boat to be rowed over [the Wörthersee, the lake on which Mahler's summer home stood]. At the first stroke of the oars, I hit upon the theme (or rather the rhythm and the style) of the introduction to the first movement, and within four weeks, the first, third and fifth movements were completely finished!"

Another three years elapsed before Mahler premiered Symphony No. 7; during that time, he continued to tinker with the orchestration and made numerous other revisions. Even after he began rehearsing the Prague orchestra that gave the premiere, Mahler could not stop making changes, which caused great stress for both composer and musicians.

The Seventh Symphony is the least known and one of the least performed of all of Mahler's symphonies. Like the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, the Seventh is a purely instrumental work, without the choruses, vocal soloists, or specific programs Mahler wrote for his first four symphonies. Its five movements form an arch, with the quasi-sinister *Scherzo* as the central anchor, flanked by the two *Nachtmusiks*, which are themselves encompassed by the vast energy of the opening and closing sections.

Even without an extra-musical narrative, the two *Nachtmusiks* and the opening horn solo of the *Langsam* create a nocturnal atmosphere. In rehearsals, Mahler described this movement as "a tragic night without stars or moonlight." It begins with an extended solo for tenor horn (euphonium) that sounds a melody full of foreboding. In its measured quality, we can discern the steady rhythm of the oars rowing Mahler across the Wörthersee to

his summer home, but the tempo also suggests a funeral march.

The first *Nachtmusik* follows and recalls the *Langsam* with another horn solo. The primary theme, a forceful march, moves sinuously between major and minor key areas, never settling for long in either one or the other. This play of major and minor contributes to the unsettled feel of the music. When discussing this movement, Mahler made reference to Rembrandt's painting *Night Watch*. Mahler's friend, composer Alphons Diepenbrock, explained, "[This movement] is a walk at night, and [Mahler] said himself that he thought of it as a patrol . . . it is a march, full of fantastic chiaroscuro – hence the Rembrandt parallel."

In the *Scherzo*, Mahler unleashes all the darker aspects of his "Symphony of the Night" (a title appended – albeit not by Mahler himself – to the Seventh Symphony after it was published). The tempo marking for this movement is *Schattenhaft* (shadowy), and the whirling, phantasmal melodies recall Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*. This music is simultaneously the most inscrutable and the most evocative of the five. We can clearly hear, in the spiraling winds, the ethereal specters of Mahler's imagination flying to and fro. This music also evokes the grotesque imagery of German Romantic literature, from Goethe's *Erkönig* to the macabre fantasies of E.T.A. Hoffman. The accompanying trio serves as a calm interlude in the midst of this phantasmal chaos. Wisps of melodies eddy in and out of the primary musical currents, as they guide the listener further into the depths of Mahler's night.

In the second *Nachtmusik*, Mahler contrasts the wraithlike quality of the *Scherzo* with some of his most unabashedly romantic melodies and makes his intentions clear with the tempo marking *Andante amoroso* (amorous). This section features both mandolin and guitar; their distinctive sounds suggest a languid ride on a Venetian gondola, with the gondolier serenading the lovers in his boat. To create the intimacy of this movement, Mahler's writing for the orchestra is like that of a chamber ensemble. The brasses, except for horns, are absent, and the full orchestra rarely plays all at once. Hints of the previous shadows peek through the lyrical texture of this *Nachtmusik*, which is

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a true midnight serenade. In her memoirs, Alma Mahler makes a connection between this movement and the poetry of Joseph von Eichendorff; she describes it as “murmuring springs and German Romanticism.”

In rehearsals for the premiere, Mahler was reported to have said to the orchestra, “And now for daylight [Der Tag],” when beginning the *Rondo*. This movement begins with a brilliant fanfare from the horns and winds, accompanied by timpani. Mahler also includes a clear reference to Act III of Wagner’s *Die Meistersinger*, in the words of critic Michael Steinberg, as “an easily recognizable symbol for a good-humored victory finale.” The C major key is a clear departure from the murky wanderings of the previous movements. The jubilant fanfare, the rondo’s main theme, alternates with different sections generally written for smaller orchestral forces. Solo instruments and small groups elaborate on the main theme in more intimate combinations. The fanfare returns, somewhat transformed, but always retaining its grand sweep and triumphant mood.

When Mahler conducted the premiere of Symphony No. 7 in Prague, it was politely but not passionately received. “The Seventh was scarcely understood by the Prague audience,” wrote Alma Mahler, “although there was something like a *success d’estime*.” By this time, Mahler’s musical language had advanced beyond the 19th-century Romantic tradition out of which it evolved. Even among the people who recognized the Seventh Symphony as a major orchestral accomplishment, few knew quite what to make of it.

Until he heard the Seventh Symphony, Arnold Schoenberg had been something of a Mahler skeptic. After a 1909 performance in Vienna, Schoenberg wrote to Mahler, “This impression, that of the Seventh . . . These are lasting impressions. I am now wholly yours. This is a certainty. What I felt this time was a perfect repose based on artistic harmony – something that moves me without just ruthlessly shifting my center of gravity, something that draws me tranquilly and pleasantly to itself – an attraction such as guides the planets in

their courses, letting them go their own ways, influencing them, to be sure, but in a manner so easy and inevitable that there are never any sudden jolts. This may sound a bit overblown; however, it does seem to me to express clearly something I overwhelmingly felt: I reacted to you as to a classic. But one who is still a model to me.”

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## RECOMMENDED RECORDINGS

### Mahler: Symphony No. 7

Claudio Abbado – Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra

Deutsche Grammophon 471623

Leonard Bernstein – New York Philharmonic

Deutsche Grammophon 001408102

Pierre Boulez – Cleveland Orchestra

Deutsche Grammophon 001931702