

PROGRAM

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FIRST SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

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Thursday, December 1, 2011, at 8:00

Friday, December 2, 2011, at 8:00

Saturday, December 3, 2011, at 8:00

Jaap van Zweden conductor

David McGill bassoon

Stucky

Rhapsodies for Orchestra

First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

Mozart

Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191

Allegro

Andante ma adagio

Rondo: Tempo di menuetto

DAVID MCGILL

INTERMISSION

Mahler

Symphony No. 1 in D Major

Slow. Dragging. Like a sound of nature—At the beginning, very leisurely

With strong movement, but not too fast

Solemn and measured, without dragging

Stormily

Performed to commemorate the centenary of Mahler's death in 1911



Steven Stucky

Born November 7, 1949, Hutchinson, Kansas.

Rhapsodies for Orchestra

On September 18, 2008, the day *Rhapsodies for Orchestra* was performed for the first time in this country, Steven Stucky was in Dallas for the world premiere of another new work, his concert drama, *August 4, 1964*. Such popularity is rare for a composer at any time, but Stucky has always been a highly regarded, frequently commissioned—he wrote his *Picturas de Tamayo* for the Chicago Symphony in 1995—and often honored figure. His *Second Concerto for Orchestra* won the 2005 Pulitzer Prize in Music.

Chicago Symphony audiences were first introduced to Stucky in 1992, when the Orchestra performed his *Impromptus*. That same year, Stucky's name appeared again in CSO program books, this time

as the author of a program note on the Piano Concerto by Witold Lutosławski, the late Polish composer whose music Stucky has studied, with the rigor of a true scholar, throughout his career. (Stucky's 1981 book, *Witold Lutosławski and His Music*, won the ASCAP Deems Taylor Prize; Stucky was given the Lutosławski Society medal in 2005.) Not surprisingly, Stucky has named Lutosławski, along with Debussy, Stravinsky, Ravel, Bartók, and Ligeti, as important influences on his own music.

Stucky grew up in Kansas and Texas, and studied at Baylor and Cornell universities. He taught composition at Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, and, since 1980, he has served on the faculty of Cornell University,

COMPOSED

2008

FIRST PERFORMANCE

August 28, 2008, London

These are the first CSO performances

INSTRUMENTATION

three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and english horn, three clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, vibraphone, woodblock, glockenspiel, marimba, suspended cymbal, crotales, chimes, tam-tam, bass drum, harp, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

10 minutes

where he is the Given Foundation Professor of Composition. From 1988 until 1992, Stucky was composer-in-residence of the Los Angeles Philharmonic; he currently is the orchestra's Consulting Composer for New Music. He also has served as host of the New York Philharmonic's Hear & Now concert series.

Stucky's music has long been singled out for the directness and honesty of its style and language. As Stucky himself wrote, in "New Music and the Masterpiece Syndrome," about the relationship between listeners and composers: "Our task is not to predict the habits of posterity but to respond to the here and now. Genuine composers will somehow make themselves understood. Their works are communicated addressed from human beings to other human beings."

Steven Stucky on Rhapsodies for Orchestra

When the New York Philharmonic invited me to compose a short work for its European tour of August–September 2008, the invitation came with a suggestion from music director Lorin Maazel: Would I consider writing "something rhapsodic"? I ran to the dictionary for help. The more I thought about the words *rhapsody* and

rhapsodic—words I would never have chosen to describe my music—the more I realized that boundaries are meant to be pushed, and that an external, even foreign stimulus like "rhapsodic" could be just the ticket to push mine.

The resulting work is rhapsodic in two senses. It has a freely developing form, as if improvised, and it trades in ecstatic, fervent forms of expression. Although it is in one continuous movement, *Rhapsodies* is titled in the plural because it unrolls as a series of rhapsodic episodes, usually triggered by a single player whose ardent phrases gradually "infect" his neighbors until soon a whole section of the orchestra is sounding ecstatic. A solo flute (*appassionato*) draws other high woodwind voices in one by one, until they create a riotous mass of sound. A solo english horn (*cantando, fervente*) recruits clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, and more, until its whole neighborhood has broken into song, too. Solo horn and trumpet (*nobile*) launch still another outbreak, now among the brasses. Meanwhile, behind each of these episodes of rhapsodizing flows calmer, supporting music elsewhere in the orchestra, serving as a backdrop. Unrelenting fervor can only be borne for so long. Eventually, the orchestra lapses, spent, into a quiet coda, where the intense experiences that have come before can be recollected in tranquility. ■



Wolfgang Mozart

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria.

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria.

Bassoon Concerto in B-flat Major, K. 191

Although Mozart may have written as many as five bassoon concertos, this is the only one that has survived. It is the earliest of all Mozart's concertos for wind instruments, and, despite the fact that it is the work of an adolescent, this is a little masterpiece. The score is contemporary with Mozart's first piano concerto, in D major, and his first violin concertos—all products of the mid-1770s. These are works that show Mozart fully engaged in putting his own stamp on traditional forms and procedures; he is no longer an apprentice—even one with the most astonishing gifts—but a man establishing his own practice. Mozart would never quit learning, borrowing, and assimilating what he picked up in the musical world at large, but the process of transforming and personalizing had already begun.

Even though the bassoon was not a common solo instrument at the time, the main thematic material of this concerto was carefully designed expressly for the instrument, showcasing its unique qualities and disguising its limitations in power and range. In this piece, Mozart has already moved beyond mastering the general demands of concerto form to deal, in very specific and creative ways, with the individual needs of his client. Mozart often wrote music for performer-friends, but we cannot be certain for whom this concerto was intended. There are several possible candidates, including two bassoonists employed by the archbishop of Salzburg at the time, as well as Thaddäus von Dürnitz, an amateur bassoonist from Munich who apparently had commissioned bassoon works from several composers, including Mozart.

COMPOSED

1774

FIRST PERFORMANCE

unknown

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE

November 13, 1956,
Orchestra Hall. Leonard
Sharrow, bassoon; Fritz
Reiner conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCE

March 28, 2000, Orchestra
Hall. David McGill, bassoon;
Mark Elder conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

solo bassoon, two oboes, two
horns, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

18 minutes

CSO RECORDING

1984. Willard Elliot, bassoon;
Claudio Abbado conducting.
Deutsche Grammophon

The first movement highlights the bassoon's many virtues, including its extraordinary agility and the ability to trill, leap (nearly two octaves in this case), repeat notes rapid-fire, sing lyrically, and sit comfortably on prominent low notes. The interaction with the orchestra is lively and conversational, not that of a star performer

with its supporting cast. The second movement is a dreamy aria, with an elaborately embroidered melody over muted strings—an early essay in the mood of the Countess's "Porgi amor" from *The Marriage of Figaro*. The finale is a minuet—not music designed for the ballroom, but based on the lilting rhythms of the standard courtly dance. ■



Gustav Mahler

Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia.

Died May 18, 1911, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 1 in D Major

When Alma Schindler first met Gustav Mahler, whom she later married, she could only remember how much she had disliked his First Symphony. She wasn't alone. The history of this symphony, even into relatively recent times, is one of misunderstanding and rejection. The first performance, in Budapest in 1889, was greeted with indifference, bewilderment, and, in the words of the local critic, "a small, but, for all that, audible element of opposition." Mahler seldom understood the animosity his music aroused. A few years later, after Alma had taken his name and converted to the cause, Mahler wrote to her after conducting the First Symphony: "Sometimes it sent shivers down my spine. Damn it all, where do people

keep their ears and their hearts if they can't hear *that!*"

But as Alma knew, people didn't always feel what Mahler felt. For years the First Symphony led an unhappy existence, greeted by chilly receptions whenever it was played and plagued by the composer's continual fussing, both over details and the big picture. No other symphony gave him so much trouble. He couldn't even decide if this music was a symphonic poem, a program symphony, or a symphony plain and simple—or whether it should contain four or five movements. Figuring all that out was not an act of indecisiveness, but of exploration. And by the time Mahler published this music as his Symphony no. 1 some fifteen years after he began it, he had not

only discovered for himself what a symphony could be, but he had changed the way we have defined that familiar word ever since.

We begin in Kassel in 1884, with Johanna Richter, a soprano destined for fame not as a singer, but as the inspiration for Mahler's first true masterpiece, the *Songs of a Wayfarer*, and as a stimulus for this symphony. Mahler had gone to Kassel as a conductor, but found the working conditions unsatisfactory. Whatever he missed in his work he gained in life and love. Johanna Richter—or, more precisely, unreturned love—unlocked Mahler's deepest feelings that year and set his course, not as an accomplished conductor, which he surely was, but as a composer of vision and daring. It took the rest of the musical establishment a while to see it that way.

Mahler followed an unorthodox path in getting from Johanna Richter to his First Symphony, but it's one he would choose again and again when writing music, and it's

the process as much as the composer himself that gives Mahler's symphonies their unconventional stamp. Henry James once described a novelist as someone on whom nothing is lost. For Mahler, that defined a symphonist. The First Symphony is indebted, in various ways, to Johanna Richter, the *Wayfarer* songs, incidental music Mahler wrote for a production of Joseph Victor von Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen*, a familiar children's round, the wife of Carl Maria von Weber's grandson, yodeling, military fanfares, an early nineteenth-century woodcut, café music, the opening of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, bird song at dawn, a love song he wrote in 1880, reveille, the German ländler—and sights, sounds, and feelings we will never know. Since Mahler hadn't written a large, purely orchestral work before, it took him some time to find the right way to bring all his resources together and to make a convincing whole of so many parts.

COMPOSED

1888

FIRST PERFORMANCE

November 20, 1889,
Budapest, Hungary. The
composer conducting

**FIRST CSO
PERFORMANCE**

November 6, 1914,
Orchestra Hall. Frederick
Stock conducting

**MOST RECENT
CSO PERFORMANCE**

May 3, 2008, Orchestra Hall.
Bernard Haitink conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

four flutes and three
piccolos, four oboes and
english horn, four clarinets,
two E-flat clarinets and bass
clarinet, three bassoons
and contrabassoon, seven
horns, four trumpets,
three trombones and
tuba, timpani, bass drum,
cymbals, triangle, tam-tam,
harp, strings

**APPROXIMATE
PERFORMANCE TIME**

57 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1971. Carlo Maria Giulini
conducting. Angel

1981. Claudio
Abbado conducting.
Deutsche Grammophon

1983. Sir Georg Solti
conducting. London

1990. Klaus Tennstedt
conducting. EMI

1998. Pierre Boulez conduct-
ing. Deutsche Grammophon

2008. Bernard Haitink
conducting. CSO Resound

In the meantime, life presented new choices, and love was reawakened by Marion von Weber, the wife of the composer's grandson.

The piece Mahler introduced in Budapest on November 20, 1889, was billed as a "Symphonic Poem in two parts"—with three movements in part 1 and two in part 2. Only the funeral march was labeled to help listeners coming to the music

Blumine movement, originally part of the incidental music he wrote for a staging of Scheffel's narrative poem *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen*, was subsequently lost. In 1959, a score of the movement turned up at a Sotheby's auction; it was performed in 1967 for the first time since Mahler's death. The Chicago Symphony plays *Blumine* next week under Michael Tilson Thomas.) In



"The Hunter's Funeral Procession," the engraving by Moritz von Schwind which was Mahler's inspiration for the Funeral March in the First Symphony

cold. Today it's easy to see that it wasn't the lack of labels or comments, but simply the staggering range and provocative juxtaposition of materials that bothered the first audience. For the next performances, in Hamburg and Weimar (in 1893 and 1894), Mahler drew up a descriptive program, gave titles to the movements, and called the whole piece "*Titan*, a tone poem in symphonic form," after the popular novel by Jean Paul. For Berlin in 1896, Mahler again changed his mind, dropped the titles and the programmatic explanation, omitted the second movement (*Blumine*), and settled on "Symphony in D major, for large orchestra." (The

Vienna in 1900, a notice in the program indicated that Mahler wanted no explanatory notes of any kind. Why such indecision? In March 1896, at the time of the Berlin performance, Mahler wrote to the critic Max Marschalk about adding the program in the first place:

... At the time my friends persuaded me to provide a kind of program for the D major symphony in order to make it easier to understand. Therefore, I had thought up this title and explanatory material after the actual composition. I left them out for this performance, not only because I think they are

quite inadequate and do not even characterize the music accurately, but also because I have learned through past experiences how the public has been misled by them.

Still, Mahler's First Symphony wasn't understood. Critics in Frankfurt complained about the program, those in Berlin missed it. (At this same time, Strauss was writing *Till Eulenspiegel*, *Thus spake Zarathustra*, and *Ein Heldenleben*, which begged the same questions.) Even though Mahler finally decided to present this symphony as abstract music with no story to tell, he wrestled with the same dilemma again in writing Symphonies nos. 2 and 3 and came to slightly different conclusions each time. Mahler's final thoughts on this music were published in 1899 as Symphony no. 1, in four movements, and that's how it's known today.

The first movement begins "like a sound of nature," with fanfares and bird calls sounding from the distance over the gentle hum of the universe, tuned to A-natural and scattered over seven octaves. The method is one learned by every composer since Beethoven, whose Ninth Symphony opens with bits and pieces that gradually become music. It took Mahler a long time to get the opening to sound the way he wanted it; every effect is precisely calculated, with consideration given not only to the most delicate shades of dynamics, but to the placement of the players on and off the stage.

A cuckoo—unlike Beethoven's cuckoo in the *Pastoral* Symphony, it

sings the interval of a fourth instead of a third—eventually pushes the sounds of nature into a lovely, rolling melody. That tune, beginning with the cuckoo's descending fourth, comes from the second *Wayfarer* song, "Ging heut' Morgen übers Feld" (I went through the fields this morning), and its proud walking music takes Mahler a long way. Mahler reinvents the song as he goes, reshuffling phrases and motives so that even someone who knows the song finds this music continually fresh.

Next comes a brief scherzo set in motion by the foot-stomping dances and yodeling that Mahler heard and had already put to good use in one of his first songs, "Hans und Grete," in 1880. "Dance around, around!" the song goes. "Let whoever is happy weave in and out! Let whoever has cares find his way home." There is a wistful trio, music Mahler might have heard in a Viennese café, more full of cares than joy, and then the *ländler* resumes.

The third movement used to upset audiences, and even today it's puzzling to those hearing it for the first time. What are we to make of this odd assortment: a sad and distorted version of "Frère Jacques" (Mahler knew it as "Bruder Martin"); a lumbering funeral march; some cheap dance-band music remembered by pairs of oboes and trumpets over the beat of the bass drum; and the ethereal closing pages of the *Wayfarer* songs—heaven and earth all rolled into one? No wonder people didn't know whether to laugh or cry.

Mahler's only clue is "The Hunter's Funeral Procession"—a woodcut made earlier in the century by Moritz von Schwind, a friend of Schubert—which he claimed was the inspiration for this music. About the vulgar band music Mahler leaves no doubt: "With parody" he writes at the top of the page, just as the drum and cymbal join in. (At these performances, the famous "Frère Jacques" theme that opens the movement, traditionally given to muted solo double bass, is played by the entire section, muted. This is a rereading of Mahler's intentions, which have long been misunderstood. Although Mahler experimented with this passage for several years in order to get the effect he had in mind, he apparently settled on the idea of having all the double basses play this haunting "solo" in unison, only to discover that this was beyond the capability of most orchestral bass sections. Giving it to the principal player alone was an expedient compromise at the time that has erroneously become a convention. Bernard Haitink, leading performances

here in 2008, was the first Chicago Symphony conductor to restore Mahler's original intentions.)

The finale begins with a "flash of lightning from a dark cloud," Mahler tells us. "It is simply the cry of a wounded heart." This is music in search of victory, and Mahler retreats from battle several times before he triumphs. The first stop allows us to savor some lovely pastoral music we would recognize if Mahler hadn't ultimately chosen to omit his original second movement, *Blumine*. Later we return to the fields of the first movement, but we're no longer setting off on our journey—we're headed straight for the triumph that Mahler's wayfarer couldn't achieve. This time success is swift and unequivocal, and when the seven horns are asked to play out—"even over the trumpets"—victory is won. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.