

ONE HUNDRED TWENTY-FOURTH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Zell Music Director

Pierre Boulez Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus

Yo-Yo Ma Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

Bank of America 
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Thursday, April 9, 2015, at 8:00

Friday, April 10, 2015, at 8:00

Saturday, April 11, 2015, at 8:00

Tuesday, April 14, 2015, at 7:30

Bernard Haitink Conductor

Mahler

Symphony No. 7

Slow—Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo

Night Music 1: Allegro moderato

Scherzo: Shadowy

Night Music 2: Andante amoroso

Rondo finale: Allegro ordinario

There will be no intermission.

Saturday's performance is sponsored by ITW.

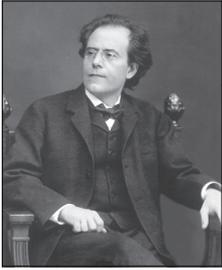
CSO Tuesday series concerts are sponsored by United Airlines.

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Gustav Mahler

Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia.
Died May 18, 1911, Vienna, Austria.

Symphony No. 7



Gustav Mahler composed music only during the summer, when he had time off from his job as director of the Vienna Court Opera, and every June he worried that he wouldn't be able to write anything. For seven years, he and his family sum-

mered at Maiernigg, on the Wörthersee, where he courted inspiration by maintaining a precise and orderly routine. Every morning he rose at 5:30 and went for a swim in the lake (he liked to begin with a high dive and stay under water as long as he could hold his breath). Afterwards, he dressed and climbed the hill to his studio, a tiny hut deep in the woods, where his breakfast had been carefully placed on the table. For seven hours he worked there without interruption on music his friends rarely understood.

The summer of 1904 was the most productive of Mahler's life. He finished his Sixth Symphony, began the *Kindertotenlieder*, and wrote two movements of the Seventh Symphony—the two nocturnes that became its second and fourth movements. But when he returned to Maiernigg the following June, he didn't know how to continue with this symphony and, for the first time, he felt

the desolation of being unable to compose a single measure of music, despite daily effort. After two weeks of blank pages and nervous pacing, he gave up and went hiking in the Dolomites (walking was one of his great pleasures and it had gotten him through tough times before), but still no music came to him. ("There I was led the same dance," he told his wife Alma.) He returned to Krumpendorf, on the shore opposite Maiernigg, convinced that the entire summer was lost. "You were not at Krumpendorf to meet me," he later wrote to Alma, "because I had not let you know the time of my arrival. I got into the boat to be rowed across. At the first stroke of the oars the theme (or rather the rhythm and character) of the introduction to the first movement came into my head."

In that moment, Mahler discovered the beginning of this symphony, with its haunted horn call over lapping waters, and he remembered how it felt to be filled with music and eager to work it out on paper. The floodgates opened. In four weeks, Mahler composed the remaining three movements—the ones we now know as the first, third, and last. By mid-August his Seventh Symphony was completed in essence, if not in detail, and he returned to Vienna knowing that his holiday had been exceedingly well spent.

The Seventh Symphony wasn't performed for three years, during which time Mahler's life

COMPOSED

summers of 1904 and 1905

FIRST PERFORMANCE

September 19, 1908, Prague. The composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

April 15 & 16, 1921, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting (U.S. premiere)

August 4, 1979, Ravinia Festival. James Conlon conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

October 14, 15, 16 & 17, 2010, Orchestra Hall. Pierre Boulez conducting

July 25, 2013, Ravinia Festival. James Conlon conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

four flutes and two piccolos, three oboes and english horn, three clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, three bassoons and contra-bassoon, four horns and tenor horn, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba,

timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, glockenspiel, tambourine, cowbells, tubular bells, mandolin, guitar, two harps, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME

81 minutes

CSO RECORDINGS

1971. Georg Solti conducting. London
1980. James Levine conducting. RCA
1984. Claudio Abbado conducting. Deutsche Grammophon

Mahler's Symphony Introduced Here by the Orchestra

BY RUTH MILLER.

IN Amsterdam you may hear Mahler's Seventh symphony, which received its initial American performance at Orchestra hall yesterday, for the Dutch equivalent of 11 cents. Over there they are so addicted to this music-maker's orchestral tricks and contrapuntal dodges, his choppy rhythms and fateful melodies, that, not content with hearing them at the regular orchestra concerts, they have them played on their "pop" programs.

It was at one of these popular concerts last summer that Mr. Stock heard this most spontaneous of the nine symphonies of the indefatigable Mahler and decided to introduce it to us. Now that the introduction has been accomplished so expertly by the Chicago orchestra, it is to be feared Mr. Mahler's Seventh orchestral treatise will be accepted by our symphonists with certain reservations.

Orchestrally Mr. Mahler says many things, says them well, says them often. He speaks with a vast symphonic erudition, but, like all great pedants, without any spectacular originality, finesse, or style. His symphony is alive with martial, jagged rhythms.

He seemed to be haunted by the dotted note. All his weaknesses are crowded into the first and fifth movements. These the audience received with tempered politeness.

All his virtues are in the two serenades and the scherzo. Therein may be found the elfin charm born of incredibly dextrous instrumentation, lovely, wistful melodies, and the orchestral balance and unity resultant from master craftsmanship. They are delightful fragments, a little conscious and deliberate in their charming.

It is concentrated skill in music writing, a bag of pleasant tricks, this symphony, and not the least among them is his use of cowbells. It is not our province to argue the propriety of a cowbell at a symphony concert, and yesterday there could be no doubt that it added a piquant tinkle to the sixty-five minute Mahler interlude.

Eighth Symphony was sketched in its entirety in just eight weeks—the following year brought disruption and tragedy. In March 1907, Mahler gave in to pressure from the administration of the Vienna Opera and to rising anti-Semitism, and resigned his position as director of the company. (He then signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, to begin in the new year.) Shortly after Mahler and his family arrived in Maiernigg that summer, his four-year-old daughter Maria took ill with scarlet fever and died; a few days later Mahler was diagnosed with a serious heart condition. Mahler quickly abandoned Maiernigg and rented a place at Toblach, in the Dolomites. He spent his days there reading a book of Chinese poems a friend had given him, and he attempted to follow the regimen of leisurely strolls and lean cuisine the doctors ordered. He wrote no music that summer.

Mahler returned to Vienna, where he conducted *Fidelio* for the last time on October 15, bid farewell to the Viennese public with a performance of his Second Symphony on November 24, and left for New York in early December. He originally thought of giving the premiere of the Seventh Symphony in New York, but reconsidered, explaining, "The Seventh is too complicated for a public which knows nothing of me." (At that point, New Yorkers had heard only Mahler's Fourth Symphony; the Chicago Symphony hadn't even played any of Mahler's music yet.) The premiere of the Seventh was then scheduled for September 19 in Prague, as part of a festival honoring the sixtieth year of the emperor Franz Joseph's reign. After spending the summer of 1908 in Toblach, Mahler traveled to Prague to begin rehearsals.

The young conductor Otto Klemperer, who went to Prague to watch Mahler at work, later recalled that around two dozen rehearsals were necessary to prepare this difficult new symphony. "Each day after rehearsal," Klemperer wrote, "[Mahler] used to take the entire orchestral score home with him for revision, polishing, and retouching." Rehearsals were somewhat chaotic, and the musicians were wary of Mahler's demanding score; a brass player confronted the composer: "I'd just like to know what's beautiful about blowing away at a trumpet stopped up to a high C-sharp." Mahler had no answer, although

Ruth Miller reviewed the CSO's premiere of Mahler's Seventh Symphony for the *Chicago Tribune*, April 16, 1921

was turned upside down. Although the summer of 1906 was highly productive—the massive

he put a characteristically philosophical spin on the encounter when he wrote to Alma about man's inability to understand the agony of his own existence. When Alma arrived in Prague a few days before the premiere, she found the hotel suite littered with orchestra parts and her husband a nervous wreck. The Seventh Symphony was received with respect rather than enthusiasm (the critic from Berlin was particularly hard on the work). When Mahler conducted the score in Munich a few weeks later, the response was similar, but the composer was not disheartened. He had learned to expect no more.

In November 1909, Arnold Schoenberg attended the Vienna premiere of the Seventh conducted by Ferdinand Löwe. Schoenberg himself stood at the threshold of a new frontier in music—"I am conscious of having broken through every restriction of a bygone aesthetic," he wrote that year. He had already abandoned tonality, a move of almost unfathomable consequences, and Mahler's brave new score sounded to him like music from the old world. It struck him as "perfect repose based on perfect harmony. . . . I have put you with the classical composers—but as one who to me is still a pioneer." Most listeners then, however, found Mahler's music nearly as incomprehensible as Schoenberg's, and the Seventh Symphony, in particular, took a long time to make friends.

The Seventh has remained something of an outsider among Mahler's symphonies. It is still

the least well known of the nine he completed; it is often the last one conductors learn, and the one orchestras rarely play—with the possible exception of the Eighth, which is seldom performed simply because of the enormous forces it requires. When Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony performed the Seventh Symphony for the first time, in April 1921, it had never before been played in this country.

The Seventh Symphony doesn't disclose its secrets readily. Perhaps because of its jigsaw construction—further complicated by the composer's bout with writer's block—it lacks the sheer narrative sweep of Mahler's other symphonies. Mahler's working methods were always idiosyncratic, but the Seventh gave him particular trouble. He didn't have a grand design in mind when he started composing it in 1904, and when he returned to the symphony the following summer, he apparently still hadn't outlined the entire work. The three movements he wrote that year weren't composed "in order," and, according to Donald Mitchell, who has studied the composer's manuscript, the first movement was the last one to be finished.

Like its two immediate predecessors, the Seventh is purely instrumental; there's no vocal text to suggest an extramusical topic, and Mahler never divulged a hidden program, even when pestered by colleagues and friends. The Seventh is sometimes called the *Song of the Night*; the title

MAHLER'S SEVENTH MINUS ELEVEN MINUTES—AN AMERICAN PREMIERE IN CHICAGO

On April 15, 1921, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra gave the American premiere of Mahler's Seventh Symphony under Frederick Stock. This was the sixth of Mahler's symphonies to be performed in the United States, and it is the only one that Stock and his orchestra introduced to this country. The Chicago Symphony played Mahler's music for the first time in 1907, when the local premiere of the composer's Fifth Symphony was neatly summarized by the *Chicago Examiner* headline, "Ugly Symphony Is Well Played."

Stock heard Mahler's Seventh Symphony for the first time in Amsterdam in 1920. He got a copy of the score in Paris and programmed the work for the penultimate concert

of the 1920–21 season in Chicago. Perhaps fearing that the Chicago public would not share his enthusiasm for the Seventh Symphony, Stock announced that he had cut out eleven minutes of music, paring the playing time down to one hour and four minutes. One critic noticed that unusually long pauses between movements, however, were still necessary for the "refreshment" of the players. The Chicago performance was well received. The *Chicago Evening Post* reported that "the orchestra played with astonishing virtuosity. There was nothing Mahler could write which they could not play, as they demonstrated to full satisfaction. At the close of the symphony there was a great demonstration for Mr. Stock, in which

he had all the players rise and join." After the concert, Stock said, "Mahler is one of the coming composers and the musical world is just beginning to understand him." Mahler's Seventh Symphony was programmed the following two seasons under Stock's baton, but over the next fifty years the Chicago Symphony played it only twice. Even in recent years, Mahler's Seventh hasn't achieved the popularity of several of the composer's other symphonies. In Chicago, its champions over the past four decades form a short but distinguished list: Sir Georg Solti, Claudio Abbado, Daniel Barenboim, Pierre Boulez, and now Bernard Haitink.

—P. H.

isn't Mahler's, but he once wrote to the Swiss critic William Ritter of the symphony's "three night pieces" (referring to the central triptych), and of the finale as "bright day."

The Seventh Symphony is in five movements, a scheme Mahler had used most recently in his Fifth Symphony. This time he chose a symmetrical arrangement, with a dark and fiery scherzo at the center, surrounded by the two nocturnes and framed at either end by large and energetic movements (there is no true slow movement). Like the Fifth Symphony, the Seventh doesn't end in the key in which it begins, but a half step higher—here moving from its brooding B minor introduction to the brilliant C major of the finale.

The opening movement is the largest—a great journey through shadow and light set in motion by the boatman's oars at Maiernigg. A magnificent theme rises over the rhythm of the rowing—"Here nature roars," Mahler told Ritter. Mahler gave this melody to the tenor horn, an instrument with a dark and mysterious tone that he remembered from the military bands which he often heard as a child, when his family lived near an army barracks. This movement is one of Mahler's most fantastic creations. The harmonies are bold and exotic, often built from superimposed fourths rather than thirds, like the chords Schoenberg coincidentally was using at the same time. For the last time, Mahler follows the itinerary of sonata form—he specifies that the rhapsodic second theme should be performed in precisely the same tempo as the first (a recommendation that is often ignored). His sense of fearless adventure gives this music its character and force, and it's marked throughout by resonant, glittering sonorities. At the height of the development section, Mahler stops to listen to the world around him; one hears only distant fanfares and the gentle hum of the night. Suddenly the harp reveals the sky, afire with stars.

The first of the two movements that Mahler titled "night music" is a slow march through a nocturnal landscape; he once described it as a "night patrol." It begins with horn calls echoing across the valley and is colored by cowbells and birdcalls—the sounds of nature that he so loved. Mahler said he wanted the cowbells to sound as distant as possible, as if coming from far across the meadow. At one of the rehearsals in Prague, the composer asked to have a window

closed because he was disturbed by a bird outside—"This one's not in my score," he said.

At the beginning of the third movement, Mahler wrote *Schattenhaft* (shadowy). The darkest of his scherzos, this is a nightmare of waltz tunes and ländler. He filled these pages with ominous and grotesque effects; even the quietest passages are disturbed by startling thumps from the timpani and loud noises in the bassoons and tuba. A more genial trio offers a brief change of mood, but no real relief.

The second Night Music is a serenade in F major scored for chamber orchestra; a solo violin has the lover's song, accompanied by the plucked strings of the mandolin, guitar, and harp. (Mahler conceived this music with the guitar in mind—Schoenberg later wrote that "the whole movement is based on this sonority"; the mandolin was an afterthought.) This is intimate, often delicate music, and Alma said that when her husband wrote it he was "beset by Eichendorff-ish visions—murmuring springs and German romanticism." In 1948, when Olin Downes, the conservative *New York Times* music critic, wrote disparagingly of Mahler's Seventh Symphony, Arnold Schoenberg sent him an angry letter, offering the simple melodies from this movement as evidence of Mahler's creative power.

The finale instantly brings the "bright day" of C major. It opens in a blaze of timpani flourishes and horn fanfares; the effect is momentarily blinding, like "parting the curtains in a dark room and finding oneself dazzled by brilliant sunlight," as Donald Mitchell suggests. The music recalls—and practically quotes—Wagner's prelude to *Die Meistersinger*; on at least one occasion, Mahler actually conducted the Wagner score and the symphony on the same program to underscore their affinity. The mood of Mahler's finale, like Wagner's opera, is joyous, occasionally riotous, and even playful. The nocturnal specter of the first movement returns near the end, but it only demonstrates, by contrast, the indomitable brilliance of the finale's primary colors. This is the most openhearted, exuberant, and good-humored music of Mahler's career, and by the time he conducted the premiere only three years after he had finished the symphony, it was a kind of music he could not ever write again. ■

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