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ESA-PEKKA SALONEN
MAHLER
SYMPHONY No.9



ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

MAHLER
SYMPHONY NO.6

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MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO.6

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No.6 in A minor

①	I. Allegro energico, ma non troppo	24.00
②	II. Scherzo. Wuchtig	13.10
③	III. Andante	14.06
④	IV. Finale. Allegro moderato – Allegro energico	29.16
	Total timings	80.35

PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA
ESA-PEKKA SALONEN conductor

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MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO.6

MAHLER Symphony No.6 (1903-04)

The Sixth is an extraordinary and highly individual symphony even in Mahler's output of extraordinary and individual works. It is often cited as his most classical symphony in that it returns to a four-movement plan and uses neither solo nor choral voices. Like its neighbours, the Fifth and Seventh, the Sixth Symphony thus seems to return to symphonic tradition. But what is said less often, is that it does so not to confirm that tradition, but to wrestle with it. It takes up the legacy of the symphony since Beethoven, of heroic struggle towards some eventual breakthrough and affirmation, but presents the unthinkable – that this struggle might fail, that the symphonic hero might actually be defeated.

The Sixth Symphony sometimes carries the title, *The Tragic*. Mahler proposed it,

and then withdrew it, perhaps for the same reason that he withdrew the final and fatal hammer blow from the last movement, because he was, by nature, a superstitious man. But the original title neatly draws attention to the model that this work subverts, Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. The hero lives on in Mahler's music, but finds himself in a very different world to Beethoven's. Perhaps the epithet 'Tragic' might be understood in the terms that Friedrich Nietzsche set out in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872). The hero of ancient Greek tragedy, Nietzsche argued, must necessarily be destroyed, because tragedy is an enactment of the metaphysical truth that individual forms (represented by the hero) must inevitably perish and be reclaimed by the totality (represented by the chorus).

The first movement is a march and a decidedly grim one at that. For a start, the music seems to get stuck on its tramping bass line, as if the whole orchestra were marching on the spot. The insistence of this repeated rhythm is combined with melodic lines that are stretched over wide intervals and often heavily doubled in Mahler's orchestration to create a hard-edged sound. The uncompromising and forceful opening eventually subsides but is rounded off by a startling motto theme – three trumpets blaring out a major triad that then falls mournfully into a minor one, over a rhythm punched out in the timpani. A mysterious chorale-like passage in the woodwind provides a transition to the second theme in which, Mahler apparently told his wife Alma, he had tried to capture something of her. Certainly, it is passionate, intense and mercurial, if not rather theatrically so. The progression of the movement is shaped around the opposition of these two ideas, in which the hard energy of the march seems to get the upper hand, but this is interrupted by an extraordinary and unexpected detour – an episode inter-cut into the main narrative like a dream sequence in a film.

The distant sound of cowbells and the unworldly tones of the orchestra mark this out as one of Mahler's evocations of nature – a distant landscape glimpsed momentarily before being violently interrupted by the unprepared return of the march material. Only at the very end of the movement is there a sense of breakthrough, as A minor gives way to A major in an affirmative ending marked by all eight horns sounding out a lively return of the Alma theme.

The *Scherzo* is generally played second though there remains disagreement on the question. This was the sequence in the first edition of the score (and the order in which Esa-Pekka Salonen conducts the movements for this performance), but at the première in Essen in 1906, Mahler decided to perform the *Andante* before the *Scherzo*, an alteration reflected in the second edition of the score. The decision changes the nature of the work to some extent. Heard second, the *Scherzo* immediately restores the key of A minor, reversing the blaze of the major key heard at the end of the previous movement (a kind of macro-version of the motto theme itself). The *Scherzo* also brings

back the insistent repeated bass notes of the first movement, but the march rhythm is here displaced by a triple metre and constant disruptions by off-beat accents. As a result of the doubling of instruments and Mahler's use of extreme registers, the tone is often deliberately harsh. But, as in the first movement, the principal narrative is intercut with an unprepared *Trio* episode, a strangely rustic moment which Mahler marks *altväterisch* (old-fashioned). Where the main *Scherzo* material is unrelenting in its insistent push forward, this episode seems to have all the time in the world. Such changes of mood and musical voice run through the whole movement, disorientating the listener all the way to the last bars, which simply wind down rather than end.

The *Andante* is one of Mahler's most lyrical slow movements, beginning as an instrumental 'song without words' like the *Adagietto* of the Fifth Symphony. In the context of the Sixth Symphony as a whole it takes on the character of a reminiscence, a sustained vision of an idyllic landscape, but framed between the threatening dark cliffs of the other movements. The principal

melody exploits Mahler's technique of dividing the line between the First and Second Violin sections, creating a sense of one melodic wave riding over the other. The idea that this movement is an idyll is confirmed by the shift from its key of E flat major to Mahler's 'heavenly key' of E major, accompanied by the return of cowbells (this time heard as if close by, not in the distance as they were in the first movement). Twice the music breaks through into E major, but only momentarily. With the fall back to the main key the movement seems to confirm its own air of unreality and its status as a wistful memory, out of time and curiously distant from the rest of the work.

The peacefulness of its ending acts as a foil to the eruption with which the *Finale* begins. Where the landscape of the previous movement was idyllic, the one into which the listener is suddenly thrown in the *Finale* is utterly mysterious. As the operatic smoke clears, a violent restatement of the motto theme returns us to the world of the first movement and then falls away to nothingness. What emerges from the silence is the lone voice of a tuba. Disembodied

fragments of a march theme appear, but without any energy to galvanise them. Gradually, the elements are assembled into something forward moving, but each time it gets going it seems to be ripped up and has to start again. Battle ensues on a massive scale. Just as victory seems to be in sight and a breakthrough might be envisaged, the music is physically and brutally interrupted by a terrifying thud.

This is the first of Mahler's three 'hammer blows'. In the score he directed that it should be delivered 'like an axe blow'. In the heroic narrative of the symphonic finale,

the hero should pick himself up from this appalling set back and go on to win the day. Mahler's hero does indeed pick himself up but only to be struck down for a second time. Once more, he rises to his feet. At the very moment he seems to be about to win through he is utterly felled by a third blow, from which he does not recover. A funereal cortège of four trombones accompanies the tuba to the end. A final, horrifying scream of the motto rings out, fades and is cut off by a single *pizzicato* in the strings, like a clod of earth hitting the lid of a coffin.

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BIOGRAPHIES

ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

Conductor and composer Esa-Pekka Salonen has been Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra

London since 2008 and Artistic Director of the Baltic Sea Festival since 2003. After seventeen years at its helm as Music Director, he also holds the title of Conductor Laureate of the Los Angeles Philharmonic since 2009.

Salonen's appointment with the Philharmonia cements a relationship that dates back over 25 years. He made his London conducting début at the age of 25 with the Philharmonia Orchestra in September 1983, stepping in at the last minute to lead a now-legendary performance of Mahler's Symphony No. 3. He accepted the position of Principal Guest Conductor, which he held from 1985-1994, and has returned to conduct the Orchestra on a regular basis ever since. With the Philharmonia and in other projects, Esa-Pekka Salonen's work has consistently focused on multi-artform collaboration, artistic excellence and rich learning opportunities, rediscovering and reinvigorating the music of the past for our times.

In his position as Artistic Director, Esa-Pekka Salonen appears regularly at the Baltic Sea Festival, which invites celebrated orchestras, conductors and soloists to promote unity and ecological awareness among the countries around the Baltic Sea. Each festival, he pays homage to the rich artistic legacy in Scandinavia by programming and collaborating with the region's top artistic institutions. Since

its inception, these have included, among others, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (where he made his conducting debut in 1979), the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra (of which he was Chief Conductor from 1985-1995) and the Helsinki Festival (of which he was Artistic Director in 1995 and 1996).

During Salonen's tenure with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where he was Music Director from 1992 until 2009, and since he has accepted the position of Conductor Laureate from 2009, his contributions extended far beyond subscription concerts and international tours. The genesis of many unique festivals and collaborations under his leadership included his "Tristan Project" (2007), a production of "Saint François d'Assise" at the Salzburg Festival (1992), and a "Stravinsky Festival" at the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris (1996).

As a composer, Salonen's works are regularly performed and broadcast around the world; *Floof* and *LA Variations* have become established as modern classics. Three major retrospectives of his work (most recent at Festival Présences Paris,

in February 2011, at the Stockholm International Composer Festival in October 2004 and at Musica Nova, Helsinki, in March 2003) were presented to capacity audiences and were critically acclaimed.

philharmonia orchestra

The Philharmonia Orchestra is one of the world's great orchestras. Acknowledged as the UK's foremost musical pioneer, with an extraordinary recording legacy, the Philharmonia leads the field for its quality of playing, and for its innovative approach to audience development, residencies, music education and the use of new technologies in reaching a global audience. Together with its relationships with the world's most sought-after artists, most importantly its Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Philharmonia Orchestra is at the heart of British musical life.

In addition to the recordings of his own compositions, Esa-Pekka Salonen has a considerable discography on the Signum label (together with the Philharmonia Orchestra), Deutsche Grammophon, and Sony Classical.

Today, the Philharmonia has the greatest claim of any orchestra to be the UK's National Orchestra. It is committed to presenting the same quality, live music-making in venues throughout the country as it brings to London and the great concert halls of the world. In 2011/12 the Orchestra is performing more than 160 concerts, as well as presenting chamber performances by the Soloists of the Philharmonia Orchestra, and recording scores for films, CDs and computer games. For 16 years now the Orchestra's work has been underpinned by its much admired UK and International Residency Programme, which began in

1995 with the launch of its residencies at the Bedford Corn Exchange and London's Southbank Centre. During 2011/12 the Orchestra not only performs more than 35 concerts at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, but also celebrates its 15th year as Resident Orchestra of De Montfort Hall in Leicester and its 11th year as Orchestra in Partnership at The Anvil in Basingstoke; and launches a new residency at the new Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury. The Orchestra's extensive touring schedule this season also includes performances in more than 30 of the finest international concert halls in Europe, China and the United Arab Emirates, with conductors including Esa-Pekka Salonen, Lorin Maazel and Kurt Masur.

During its first six decades, the Philharmonia Orchestra has collaborated with most of the great classical artists of the 20th century. Conductors associated with the Orchestra include Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Toscanini, Cantelli, Karajan and Giulini. Otto Klemperer was the first of many outstanding Principal Conductors, and other great names have included Lorin

Maazel (Associate Principal Conductor), Riccardo Muti (Principal Conductor and Music Director), Giuseppe Sinopoli (Music Director) and Sir Charles Mackerras (Principal Guest Conductor). As well as Esa-Pekka Salonen, current titled conductors are Christoph von Dohnányi (Honorary Conductor for Life), Kurt Sanderling (Conductor Emeritus) and Vladimir Ashkenazy (Conductor Laureate).

The Philharmonia Orchestra continues to pride itself on its long-term collaborations with the finest musicians of our day, supporting new as well as established artists. This policy extends into the Orchestra itself, where many of the players have solo or chamber music careers alongside their work with the Orchestra. The Philharmonia's Martin Musical Scholarship Fund has for many years supported talented musicians at the start of their careers, including an Orchestral Award, which allows two young players every year to gain performing experience within the Orchestra. The Orchestra is also recognised for its innovative programming policy, at the heart of which is a commitment to performing



and commissioning new works by leading composers, among them the Artistic Director of its *Music of Today* series, Unsuk Chin. Since 1945 the Philharmonia Orchestra has commissioned more than 100 new works from composers including Sir Harrison Birtwistle, Sir Peter Maxwell Davies, Mark-Anthony Turnage and James MacMillan.

Throughout its history, the Philharmonia Orchestra has been committed to finding new ways to bring its top quality live performance to audiences worldwide, and to using new technologies to achieve this. Many millions of people since 1945 have enjoyed their first experience of classical music through a Philharmonia recording, and in 2011/12

audiences can engage with the Orchestra through webcasts, podcasts, downloads, computer games and film scores as well as through its unique interactive music education website, The Sound Exchange (www.philharmonia.co.uk/thesoundexchange). More than 3,500 people a month download free monthly Philharmonia video podcasts, which include artist interviews and features on repertoire and projects; these films are also watched by more than one million people on YouTube. In May 2010 the Orchestra's digital "virtual Philharmonia Orchestra" project, RE-RITE,

won both the RPS Audience Development and Creative Communication Awards, and after appearances in London, Leicester and Lisbon tours to Dortmund in November 2011.

Recording and broadcasting both continue to play a significant part in the Orchestra's activities, notably through its partnership with Signum Records, releasing new live recordings of Philharmonia performances with its key conductors. Since 2003 the Philharmonia has enjoyed a major partnership with Classic FM, as The Classic FM Orchestra on Tour, as well as continuing to broadcast on BBC Radio 3.

Recorded live at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall, London, 28 May 2009

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