

The NAXOS logo is located in the top left corner, featuring the word "NAXOS" in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background. Above the text are stylized white lines representing a classical architectural pediment with columns.

NAXOS

SCHUMANN

(re-orchestrated by Mahler)

Symphony No. 1 'Spring' • Symphony No. 2



**ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra
Marin Alsop**

Robert Schumann (1810–1856)

Symphonies Nos. 1 ‘Spring’ and 2 (re-orchestrated by Gustav Mahler)

Robert Schumann’s works lie at the centre of German Romantic music both historically and stylistically.

Essentially a lyrical composer, his output of hundreds of songs continues the tradition of German Lieder from Schubert and Schumann’s place is undeniably in the very first rank. Song cycles such as *Dichterliebe* and *Frauenliebe und -Leben* occupy a very special place in the hearts of listeners and his melodic and harmonic strengths in these smaller forms seemed to occur naturally without the need for years of arduous compositional study.

Born in Zwickau, Saxony, Robert Schumann studied with the renowned piano pedagogue Friedrich Wieck. These piano studies eventually ended in disaster when an injury to Robert’s right hand made a concert career impossible. He switched to composition and later married Wieck’s daughter the concert pianist Clara Wieck. Songs and piano pieces had been Robert’s métier, but Clara had grander ambitions for him.

Consequently, by 1841 symphonic writing was becoming central and throughout 1845 both he and Clara were studying Bach’s works together for their contrapuntal and structural strengths. Four symphonies emerged between 1841 and 1851.

The Robert and Clara Schumann circle was a magnet for aspiring and established musicians, with friends and acquaintances that included Mendelssohn. Notably a youthful Brahms studied and lived with them for some time. However, Robert’s physical and mental health began to deteriorate seriously during the later 1840s and he succumbed to an early death in 1856.

With a family of eight children and an active concert career Clara proved the rock on which her idyllic love match with Robert was built. She was his muse and whether in his symphonies, songs or piano music Clara’s presence is always felt through many musical references. For some this seems to encapsulate the very essence of Romantic music.

Gustav Mahler and the Schumann Symphonies

Robert Schumann married Clara Wieck in 1840 and before long his *First Symphony* – sketched out at breakneck speed over four days – was given its initial performance on 31 March 1841 by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, conducted by Felix Mendelssohn. Adolf Böttger’s poem *Frühlingsgedicht* inspired its title ‘*Spring*’ *Symphony*.

Alarming signs of deterioration in Schumann’s psychological and physical health became evident during 1844 and 1845 but following an improvement his *Second Symphony* was completed in 1846 and premiered on 5 November by the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, again with Mendelssohn conducting.

Undoubtedly, Clara was influential in encouraging Schumann to broaden his compositional horizons. He had studied and attempted symphonic writing earlier during the 1830s inspired by the scores of Beethoven and Schubert, and both Robert and Clara assiduously studied Bach counterpoint during 1845.

But the road to polished orchestration proved a challenge for the composer and famously Mendelssohn had the Gewandhaus brass transpose the initial opening fanfare of the *First Symphony* up a third as Schumann had written impossibly low for them at that point.

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911), the late-Romantic composer and renowned conductor, reinstated the original fanfare during the early 1900s when he gently revised the orchestration of all four symphonies in light of modern instrumental developments and a doubling in size of the average symphony orchestra from around 45 to 90 players. Controversy has always followed Schumann’s four symphonies and many now argue that Schumann’s so called ‘idiosyncratic’ orchestration is actually perfectly suited to a historically informed performance by a 45-strong orchestra using period instruments. On the other hand, Mahler’s revisions have proved models of tasteful modification for large modern orchestras.

Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 38 ‘Spring’

I. Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace

A muscular fanfare and slow dramatic introduction reflect the wintery opening of Böttger's poem *Frühlingsgedicht* before high spirited first and second subjects herald Spring. The first subject is derived from the opening fanfare but its added speed and momentum leave the listener in no doubt this is going to be a high-octane journey. Schumann's genuine joy with his life at that moment is palpable and there is a light Mendelssohnian feel throughout the entire movement. Rhythmic drive and huge energy permeate the development and an all-enveloping tonal build up and pause marks the music's return to the restatement of first and second subjects. A surprise awaits during the coda's headlong rush as Schumann introduces a chorale-like paean of thanksgiving before the movements' breathless close.

II. Larghetto

Schumann is in his element in this simple song without words, showing his gifts for melodic writing and direct emotional contact throughout. An oh-so-elegant theme expands effortlessly across the bars, each of its three statements more embellished with complex accompaniment than the last. A short coda breathes contentment with a brief transition leading to the next movement.

III. Scherzo: Molto vivace

The playful nature of Beethoven's scherzos, in reality Minuet and Trio movements radically recast and de-gentrified, is replicated here with no fewer than two different Trios alternating with restatements of the main *Scherzo* theme. The dance nature remains but heavily rhythmic and buoyant, far more country fair than stately ballroom. Of particular interest are the tempo changes with the fast bubbling second Trio and the quirky stops and starts of the coda, all in a similar vein to Schumann's piano pieces *Scenes from Childhood*.

IV. Allegro animato e grazioso

This movement marks 'Spring's Farewell' according to Schumann and elicits a wide variety of moods, not all overtly joyful. Quotations from his *Kreisleriana* piano music indicate the fantastic and colourful nature of Schumann's visions. Nevertheless, the traditional sonata form movement manages to accommodate these, from the tripping strings of the first subject to the full orchestra explosions of the second subject. The recapitulation and coda are vintage Schumann, the latter accelerating with added abandon to a near-delirious conclusion.

Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61

I. Sostenuto assai – Allegro ma non troppo

Robert and Clara's study of Bach counterpoint literally plays out in the darkly brooding introduction of this sonata form movement. The composer's health had improved somewhat when he embarked on sketching the work, but the memory of illness remained and the moody and purposeful music is light years away from his *'Spring' Symphony*. The *Allegro* exposition is dominated by the now faster dotted rhythm of the movement's motto theme first heard in the introduction. The development section reduces this to an insistent second beat accent that permeates everything before the triumphant return of the motto theme in a recapitulation and coda that gradually increase in excitement as hope triumphs over doubt.

II. Scherzo: Allegro vivace

The *'Spring' Symphony's* country fair *Scherzo* is replaced by a restless, relentless, almost frantic *Scherzo* interspersed with two Trios, abandoning traditional triple metre for duple although retaining the driving rhythms of a wild dance. The triplets of the first Trio proceed in a rhythmically unsettled, quixotic manner while the second Trio reverts once again to Bach referencing some of the first movement's introduction. An energised and dazzling coda ends with a defiant flourish.

III. Adagio espressivo

The very Bach-like main theme of this emotionally charged slow movement anchors it and enables moods of resignation and gratitude to co-exist in an almost elegiac framework. A plaintive clarinet solo heralds the deeply felt development section that dissolves into gentle contrapuntal writing using staccato strings. The final section in C major rather than C minor brings a degree of resolution.

IV. Allegro molto vivace

This highly original movement contains two main parts, the first of which is a traditional exposition with first and second subjects. The 2/2 time signature and *Allegro molto* direction produce a startlingly fast inner pulse that carries all before it and the composer will brook no opposition. The second main part follows a brief pause and introduces an entirely new theme taken from Beethoven's *An die ferne Geliebte* song cycle setting of the words 'Take them then, these songs'. Schumann proceeds to reintroduce themes from various movements including the Symphony's opening as a tribute and there is no need to ask for whom the tribute is intended. It is, of course, Clara.

Rodney Smith

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra

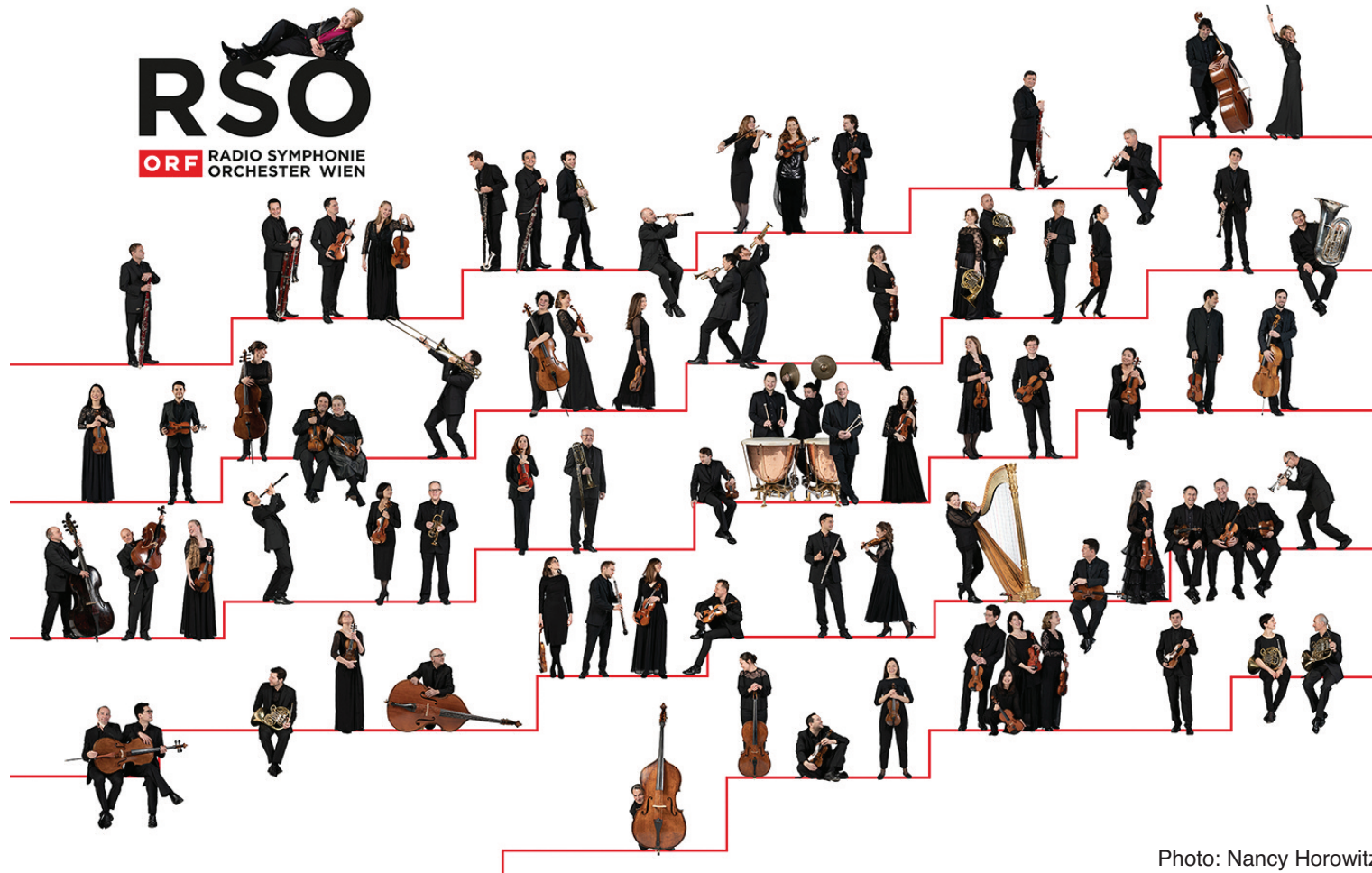


Photo: Nancy Horowitz

An ensemble of international renown, the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (ORF Vienna RSO) is a paragon of Viennese orchestral tradition. Known for its exceptional programming, the Orchestra combines 19th-century repertoire with contemporary works and rarely performed pieces from other periods. All ORF Vienna RSO performances are broadcast on the radio, and the orchestra performs in two subscription series in Vienna, in the Musikverein and the Konzerthaus. In addition, it regularly appears at major festivals in Austria and internationally such as the Salzburg Festival, musikprotokoll im steierischen herbst, and Wien Modern. The ORF Vienna RSO enjoys a successful collaboration with the Theater an der Wien, has an excellent reputation as an opera orchestra, and is also equally at home in the film music genre. The Orchestra regularly tours internationally, and its discography spans a broad range of cross-genre recordings. Under the leadership of its former chief conductors, which include Milan Horvat, Leif Segerstam, Lothar Zagrosek, Pinchas Steinberg, Dennis Russell Davies, Bertrand de Billy and Cornelius Meister, the Orchestra has continuously expanded its repertoire and its international reputation. Marin Alsop has been serving as the Orchestra's chief conductor since 2019.

www.rso.orf.at

Marin Alsop



Marin Alsop is chief conductor of the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, which she leads at Vienna's Konzerthaus and Musikverein, and on recordings, broadcasts and tours. She is chief conductor and curator of Chicago's Ravinia Festival where she conducts the Chicago Symphony's summer residencies. She is music director laureate of the Baltimore Symphony and founded the orchestra's OrchKids education programme. In 2020 she was appointed music director of the National Orchestral Institute + Festival at the University of Maryland's Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center. She is conductor of honour of Brazil's São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. Alsop has longstanding relationships with the London Philharmonic and London Symphony orchestras and guest conducts, among others, the Cleveland Orchestra, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Filarmonica della Scala, Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Danish National Symphony and Orchestre de Paris. Her discography includes acclaimed Naxos recordings of symphonies by Brahms with the London Philharmonic, Dvořák with the Baltimore Symphony, and Prokofiev with the São Paulo Symphony. The first and only conductor to receive a MacArthur Fellowship, Alsop received the World Economic Forum's Crystal Award and was the first woman to conduct the BBC's Last Night of the Proms. She is director of graduate conducting at the Peabody Institute and holds honorary doctorates from Yale University and The Juilliard School. In 2002 she founded the Taki Concordia Conducting Fellowship, which was renamed in her honour as the Taki Alsop Conducting Fellowship in 2020.

www.marinalsop.com

Robert Schumann's works lie at the centre of German Romanticism, with an essentially lyrical style that reflects his quintessential place among the great German composers. From 1840 Schumann switched from writing, primarily, piano music and Lieder, to writing orchestral music, with the joyful *First Symphony* written in just four days, and the uplifting tone of the *Second Symphony* a remarkable triumph over depression and illness. But the effectiveness of Schumann's orchestration in his symphonies has been the cause of much debate. Gustav Mahler's re-orchestrations from the early 1900s provide models of tasteful modification that are suited to the larger orchestras of today.



Robert
SCHUMANN
(1810–1856)

Symphony No. 1 in B flat major, Op. 38 'Spring' (1841) 31:38

re-orchestrated by Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

- | | | |
|---|----------------------------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | I. Andante un poco maestoso – Allegro molto vivace | 11:20 |
| 2 | II. Larghetto | 6:51 |
| 3 | III. Scherzo: Molto vivace | 5:21 |
| 4 | IV. Allegro animato e grazioso | 8:02 |

Symphony No. 2 in C major, Op. 61 (1846) 37:22

re-orchestrated by Gustav Mahler

- | | | |
|---|--------------------------------------------|-------|
| 5 | I. Sostenuto assai – Allegro ma non troppo | 12:47 |
| 6 | II. Scherzo: Allegro vivace | 6:43 |
| 7 | III. Adagio espressivo | 9:21 |
| 8 | IV. Allegro molto vivace | 8:25 |

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra
Marin Alsop

Recorded: 20–23 February 2020 at the Musikverein and ORF Funkhaus Studio 6, Vienna, Austria

Producer and editor: Erich Hofmann • Engineer: Christian Gorz

Booklet notes: Rodney Smith • Publisher: Universal Edition

Cover: *Woman before the Rising Sun* by Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840)

© & © 2022 Naxos Rights (Europe) Ltd • www.naxos.com