

Iván Fischer conducts Mahler's Fifth Symphony

Thursday, November 5, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Iván Fischer, conductor · Noah Bendix-Balgley, violin · Bruno Delepelaire, cello · Jonathan Kelly, oboe · Stefan Schweigert, bassoon

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	HAYDN 1732–1809 <i>Sinfonia concertante in B-flat major, Hob. I:105</i>	22'
2	MAHLER 1860–1911 <i>Symphony No. 5</i>	70'
TOTAL MUSIC		92'

Joseph Haydn

1732–1809

Sinfonia concertante in B-flat major, Hob. I:105

22 minutes

THE COMPOSER

Joseph Haydn was born in 1732 in the Lower Austrian village of Rohrau, the son of a wheelwright, and rose from rural poverty to become the most famous composer in Europe. After years as a chorister at St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna and a precarious freelance youth, he entered in 1761 the service of the immensely wealthy Esterházy princes, for whom he would work for nearly three decades, much of it at the remote palace of Eszterháza in rural Hungary. There, as he later put it, he was 'cut off from the world' and 'forced to become original'. Out of that isolation came the body of work that effectively defined the Classical style: he is rightly called the father of both the symphony and the string quartet, having brought each to maturity over a long, experimental career of more than a hundred symphonies and almost seventy quartets. Genial, witty, and deeply professional, Haydn was admired across Europe, befriended and influenced the young Mozart, and taught the young Beethoven. After his prince's death in 1790 he travelled twice to London, where his late 'London' symphonies and the oratorio *The Creation* made him a celebrity. He died in Vienna in 1809, having lived through, and shaped, an entire era of music.

ABOUT THE WORK

When Joseph Haydn arrived in London in 1791, he came at the invitation of Johann Peter Salomon, the violinist and impresario who had engaged him for a series of concerts. London audiences loved him, but the city's concert life was also fiercely competitive. A rival series

had brought over Ignaz Pleyel, Haydn's former pupil, and the newspapers were happy to present teacher and student as opponents. One of the fashions of the moment was the *symphonie concertante*, a work in which several soloists share the stage with the orchestra, and Pleyel had just won warm praise for one. Haydn answered within weeks.

The piece we hear tonight, which Haydn himself simply called "Concertante", was written in London in February and March of 1792 and first performed that March at one of Salomon's concerts, with Salomon leading the solo group. The manuscript suggests that it was written quickly, and the Berliner Philharmoniker's own introduction describes it as composed "in just a few days". The four soloists are a violin, a cello, an oboe and a bassoon: two strings and two winds, one high and one low of each, which gives Haydn endless possibilities for pairing, contrasting and combining them.

The premiere was a hit. The performance was repeated a week later "by popular demand", and the critics praised Haydn's originality and his variety of expression, even mentioning his unexpected silences. One reviewer singled out the finale as seemingly "expressly calculated" to display the brilliance and sweetness of Salomon's playing.

Structurally the work sits between a concerto and a symphony. There are three movements, as in a concerto, and no minuet, but the orchestra is more than an accompanist and the four soloists behave like a small chamber group inside it. At these concerts the solo parts go to four principals of the Berliner Philharmoniker, so the "rivalry" of the piece is really a conversation among colleagues who play side by side every week.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro. The orchestra introduces the main ideas before the soloists take them up. Listen for how Haydn passes a phrase from violin to oboe, or from cello to bassoon, and for moments when all four play together as a miniature wind-and-string ensemble.

II. Andante. A gentle, song-like movement and the most intimate music of the evening's first half. Listen to the blend of the oboe and the violin, and to the bassoon's warm tone in the low register.

III. Finale: Allegro con spirito. The finale is where Haydn's wit comes through most clearly, with the sudden silences that caught the attention of the first critics. The solo violin has the

most brilliant passages, written with Salomon's playing in mind, but every soloist gets a moment in the spotlight before the movement races to its close.

Gustav Mahler

70 minutes

1860–1911

Symphony No. 5

THE COMPOSER

Gustav Mahler was born on July 7, 1860, in the Bohemian village of Kaliště (now in the Czech Republic), the second of fourteen children in a Jewish family. Death was a constant presence in his childhood: many of his siblings died in infancy. This early acquaintance with mortality would permeate his music throughout his life.

Mahler's prodigious musical talent emerged early: at four he discovered his grandparents' piano and took to it at once. At fifteen he entered the Vienna Conservatory, and he later turned to conducting to earn his living, reserving composition for summer holidays. His conducting career was meteoric: by 1897, at age thirty-seven, he had become artistic director of the Vienna Court Opera, where his innovative productions and exacting standards made him one of the most celebrated opera conductors of his era.

As a composer, Mahler worked on a monumental scale. His nine completed symphonies (plus an unfinished tenth) and five song cycles represent a titanic achievement, bridging nineteenth-century Romanticism and twentieth-century modernism. Yet during his lifetime, his conducting reputation far outstripped his recognition as a composer. It was only after his death in 1911, and particularly after 1945, that Mahler's compositions gained the worldwide acclaim they enjoy today.

ABOUT THE WORK

In February 1901 Gustav Mahler suffered a sudden haemorrhage and came, as his doctor later told him, very close to death. That summer, recovering at his new lakeside villa at Maiernigg in Carinthia, he began his Fifth Symphony. In November he met Alma Schindler, the daughter of a well-known landscape painter; they married in 1902, and by the following summer, when Mahler finished the draft, she was expecting their first child. The symphony's journey from a funeral march to an exuberant finale has often been read against this background: a brush with death, then a new life.

At the time Mahler was director of the Vienna Court Opera, and he could compose only during the summer holidays. The Fifth marks a turn in his output. His Second, Third and Fourth symphonies all use voices and draw on his songs; the Fifth is purely instrumental and comes with no published programme. It also shows a new passion for

counterpoint. Mahler had been studying Bach intensively, and the finale in particular weaves several lines together with a density that surprised early listeners. Mahler went on revising the orchestration for years afterwards.

The five movements are grouped into three parts. Part I (the first two movements) is dark and violent; Part II is a single enormous Scherzo, the longest movement; Part III joins the famous Adagietto to the Rondo-Finale. The overall shape is an arch, with the Scherzo at its centre.

The Adagietto has had a life of its own. It is often played separately, and Leonard Bernstein conducted it at the funeral of Robert Kennedy in 1968, which has given it a reputation as music of mourning. But the conductor Willem Mengelberg, who knew Mahler, reported that it was meant as a declaration of love to Alma.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Part I. A solo trumpet opens the symphony with a fanfare whose rhythm recalls the opening of Beethoven's Fifth. The funeral march it introduces alternates with sudden, wild outbursts. The second movement, marked "Stürmisch bewegt, mit größter Vehemenz" (stormy, with the greatest vehemence), picks up that turbulence. Near its end a brass chorale in D major breaks through like sunlight, only to collapse. Remember that chorale: it comes back.

Part II: Scherzo. Four horns set off a whirl of Austrian country dances and Viennese waltzes. The solo horn is so prominent throughout that its part is almost a concerto in miniature. In the quieter middle section, listen for the horn calls echoing across the orchestra, as if in open country.

Part III: Adagietto and Rondo-Finale. The Adagietto is scored for strings and harp alone, after the huge forces of the previous movements. Mahler marks it "very slow". A single held horn note links it to the Finale, which bursts in with cheerful, bustling counterpoint. Fragments of the Adagietto reappear at a quicker tempo, and at the climax the brass chorale from the second movement returns, this time complete and triumphant.

Tonight's artists

Noah Bendix-Balgley *violin*

First Concertmaster

Bruno Delepelaire *cello*

First Principal Cello

Jonathan Kelly *oboe*

Principal Oboe

Jonathan Kelly has been principal oboe of the Berliner Philharmoniker since 2003. He played in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and read history at Cambridge before studying the oboe at the Royal Academy of Music in London with Celia Nicklin and then in Paris with Maurice Bourgue. Straight after his studies he became principal oboe of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, a post he held until his move to Berlin. Alongside his orchestral work he appears as a soloist and chamber musician, and he has taught at the orchestra's Karajan Academy and at the Royal Academy of Music, of which he is a Fellow.

Stefan Schweigert *bassoon*

Principal Bassoon

Stefan Schweigert, born in Kaiserslautern, has been principal bassoon of the Berliner Philharmoniker since 1985. He studied with Klaus Thunemann in Hanover and has taught at the orchestra's Karajan Academy since 1987. A committed chamber musician, he has been a member of the Scharoun Ensemble Berlin, has performed with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and at Gidon Kremer's Lockenhaus festival, and plays in András Schiff's Cappella Andrea Barca and in Sabine Meyer's wind ensemble.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Why Mahler?: How One Man and Ten Symphonies Changed Our World**

Norman Lebrecht, Anchor 2011

Norman Lebrecht's personal, opinionated introduction to Mahler and his symphonies, a good way into the Fifth and the Adagietto.

ACCESSIBLE **Gustav Mahler**

Jens Malte Fischer, Yale University Press 2013

A full modern biography of Mahler in one volume, strong on the Vienna years in which he composed the Fifth Symphony.

DEEPER **Gustav Mahler, Volume 2: Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897-1904)**

Henry-Louis de La Grange, Oxford University Press 1995

The second volume of de La Grange's monumental Mahler biography covers 1897 to 1904, the years of the Fifth Symphony and of Mahler's marriage to Alma.

SOURCES

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2. Iván Fischer conducts Mahler's Fifth Symphony, Digital Concert Hall. <https://www.digitalconcerthall.com/en/concert/57051>
3. Sinfonia Concertante (Haydn), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinfonia_Concertante_\(Haydn\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinfonia_Concertante_(Haydn))
4. Concertante for Oboe, Bassoon, Violin, and Violoncello (Hob.I:105), Bärenreiter. <https://www.barenreiter.co.uk/concertante-for-oboe-bassoon-violin-and-violoncello-hob-i-105-full-score.html>
5. Concertante B flat major Hob. I:105, G. Henle Verlag. <https://www.henle.de/Concertante-B-flat-major-Hob.-I-105-for-Oboe-Bassoon-Violin-Violoncello-and-Orchestra/HN-154>
6. Symphony No. 5 (Mahler), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_\(Mahler\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._5_(Mahler))
7. Symphony No. 5 (Mahler), Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/works/symphony-no-5-mahler>
8. Gustav Mahler: Symphony No. 5, Nashville Symphony. <https://www.nashvillesymphony.org/classical-program-notes/gustav-mahler-symphony-no-5/>
9. Jonathan Kelly, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/about-us/orchestra/musicians/jonathan-kelly/>
10. Jonathan Kelly, Royal Academy of Music. <https://www.ram.ac.uk/people/jonathan-kelly>
11. Stefan Schweigert, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/about-us/orchestra/musicians/stefan-schweigert/>
12. Stefan Schweigert, Pacific Music Festival. <https://www.pmf.or.jp/en/artist/2019/F09.html>
13. Why Mahler?: How One Man and Ten Symphonies Changed Our World, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781400096572>
14. Gustav Mahler, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300194111>
15. Gustav Mahler, Volume 2: Vienna: The Years of Challenge (1897-1904), Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780193151598>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2026-11-05-fischer>

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