

Markus Poschner and Christian Gerhaher: Mahler, Diepenbrock and Schubert's Great C major

Thursday, February 18, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Markus Poschner, conductor · Christian Gerhaher, baritone

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	MAHLER 1860–1911 <i>Das Lied von der Erde: Der Einsame im Herbst</i>	10'
2	DIEPENBROCK 1862–1921 <i>Im großen Schweigen</i>	
3	SCHUBERT 1797–1828 <i>Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 ('Great')</i>	55'
	TOTAL MUSIC	65'

Gustav Mahler

10 minutes

1860–1911

Das Lied von der Erde: Der Einsame im Herbst

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

“Der Einsame im Herbst” (The Lonely One in Autumn) is the second of the six movements of *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth), the symphony for two voices and orchestra that Gustav Mahler wrote in the summer of 1908. It is heard here on its own, as a single orchestral song.

The year before had been the worst of Mahler's life. In 1907 his elder daughter, Maria, died; he was diagnosed with a heart condition; and, after a hostile press campaign, he gave up the directorship of the Vienna Court Opera and moved the centre of his conducting career to New York. When he returned to Europe in 1908 and settled into a new summer house near Toblach, he wrote to the conductor Bruno Walter that he had lost at one stroke all the clarity and composure he had ever achieved, and had to learn to walk and stand again like a beginner. Two months later he wrote again, about a new piece: “I believe that this may be the most personal thing I have written so far.”

The words came from *Die chinesische Flöte* (The Chinese Flute), a volume of German poems that Hans Bethge published in 1907. His poems are free adaptations of earlier German and French translations of classical Chinese verse, and Mahler altered them further as he composed. The poem behind this movement is usually traced to the Tang dynasty poet Qian Qi, though the attributions in Bethge's book have been much debated. Mahler never heard the work. He died in May 1911, and Bruno Walter conducted the first performance in Munich on 20 November that year.

Mahler called the piece a symphony for tenor, alto (or baritone) voice and orchestra. The score gives the second, fourth and sixth movements to the alto, and at the alto's first entry, in this movement, Mahler adds a note that the part may if necessary be sung by a baritone. That is the option taken in these concerts.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The poem is an autumn landscape that turns inward. Mist drifts over a lake, the grass is covered in frost, the scent of the flowers has gone and the lotus leaves will soon be floating on the water. Then the speaker turns to himself: “My heart is tired. My little lamp has gone out with a crackle.”

Mahler marks the opening “somewhat dragging, exhausted”. Muted violins keep up a murmuring line that hardly ever stops, and over it a solo oboe plays a thin, drooping melody before the voice enters, almost in a monotone. The scoring is sparse, closer to chamber music than to a symphony orchestra, with solo woodwinds spinning long independent lines.

Listen for the one moment when the restraint breaks. Near the end the singer asks, “Sun of love, will you never shine again and gently dry my bitter tears?”, and for a few bars the music swells. It does not last, and the song sinks back into the exhaustion in which it began.

Alphons Diepenbrock

1862–1921

Im großen Schweigen

THE COMPOSER

Alphons Diepenbrock was born in Amsterdam in 1862 into a prosperous Catholic family and never had a formal musical training. He studied classics at the University of Amsterdam, took his doctorate in 1888 with a dissertation on Seneca and then worked for some years as a schoolteacher in ‘s-Hertogenbosch. As a composer he was self-taught. After returning to Amsterdam in the mid-1890s he lived as a private tutor in Latin and Greek, wrote essays on literature, philosophy and religion, and composed. Most of his output is vocal, and he chose his texts with a scholar’s care: the Catholic liturgy, Novalis, Hölderlin, Nietzsche, Baudelaire and Verlaine among them. His style joins the polyphony of the sixteenth-century Netherlandish masters to Wagner’s chromatic harmony and, later, to the refinement he found in Debussy. His works include the *Missa in die festo*, two *Hymnen an die Nacht* after Novalis and *Im großen Schweigen*. Willem Mengelberg performed his music with the Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Gustav Mahler was among his friends. He died in 1921.

ABOUT THE WORK

Im großen Schweigen (In the Great Silence) is a tone poem with a voice in it. Alphons Diepenbrock wrote it in 1905 for baritone and orchestra, and the first performance was given in Amsterdam on 20 May 1906 by the Concertgebouw Orchestra under Willem Mengelberg. The singer was the baritone Gerard Zalsman. According to the preface to the published study score, the piece was so well received that it was played twice that evening, before and after the interval.

The text is prose, not verse. It is section 423, in the fifth book, of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Morgenröte* (Daybreak, or The Dawn of Day), and it describes a walker who has left the town and reached the sea at

dusk. The bells are ringing the Ave Maria; then they fall silent, and so does everything else. The sea lies pale and gleaming and cannot speak. The sky glows in its mute evening colours, red, yellow and green, and cannot speak either. Faced with this enormous muteness, the speaker begins to distrust speech and even thought, and to feel his own heart swell with the silence. The Berliner Philharmoniker describe the piece as a person standing by the sea and reflecting on the limits of language and thought.

Diepenbrock was an unlikely composer. He was a classical scholar with a doctorate on Seneca, taught himself to compose and earned his living as a tutor of Latin and Greek. He was drawn again and again to Nietzsche, and to texts about night. He was also a devout Catholic, which shows in what he does with Nietzsche's text: in the orchestra he quotes the plainchant hymn "Ave maris stella" (Hail, star of the sea), first in an interlude and again at the close.

The concert places the piece after a song by Mahler for a reason. The two men became friends in these years. The American radio programme Composers Datebook has said that this score sounds a little like a lost movement from a big Mahler symphony. The study-score preface adds that Diepenbrock shortened the work by about a third in 1911 and, in 1918, made the orchestration more transparent, with Debussy's influence audible in the result.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The preface describes three sections. In the first the walker arrives at the shore and leaves behind the restless noise of the town, above all its bells. The second begins with the image of the sea itself: "The sea lies there pale and shining, it cannot speak." Diepenbrock called the piece a tone poem for orchestra and baritone, in that order, and a good deal of the telling is left to the instruments.

An orchestral interlude leads to the third section, and here the chant melody of "Ave maris stella" appears for the first time. The baritone's last lines, as the silence deepens and his heart swells once more, are followed by the chant once more, now at full strength, and it is the orchestra that has the last word.

Franz Schubert

1797–1828

Symphony No. 9 in C major, D. 944 ('Great')

THE COMPOSER

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) was born in a suburb of Vienna and spent nearly all of his short life in the city. He showed unusual gifts as a child, had his first lessons from his father and an elder brother, and at eleven became a pupil at the Stadtkonvikt school, where he got to know the orchestral music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. He went on studying composition with Antonio Salieri while training and working as a schoolteacher. He wrote at great speed and left more than a thousand works, among them over six hundred songs, the song cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, the 'Unfinished' and 'Great' C major symphonies, the 'Trout' Quintet, the String Quintet in C and the last three piano sonatas. During his lifetime his music was valued mainly by a circle of friends and admirers in Vienna, and he gave only one public concert of his own works, in March 1828. He died that November, aged thirty-one. In the decades that followed, musicians including Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt and Brahms discovered and championed his music, and he is now counted among the greatest of all composers.

ABOUT THE WORK

Franz Schubert never heard this symphony in public, and for years after his death almost nobody knew it existed. He sketched most of it in the summer of 1825 and had the score finished in 1826. Unable to pay for a performance himself, he sent it with a dedication to the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde*, Vienna's Society of Friends of Music. The society gave him a small fee and had the parts copied, and its orchestra read the piece through at a rehearsal. It was then put aside as too long and too hard.

Schubert died in November 1828, aged 31. Ten years later Robert Schumann, visiting Vienna, called on the composer's brother Ferdinand, who showed him the manuscript. Schumann arranged for a copy to go to Leipzig, where Felix Mendelssohn conducted the first public performance at the Gewandhaus on 21 March 1839. Schumann's review coined the phrase that has stuck to the work ever since: its "heavenly length".

Orchestras took longer to be convinced, and for years many of them regarded the piece as too long and too difficult. A story has it that when Mendelssohn tried to rehearse it in London in the 1840s, the violinists laughed out loud at their part in the finale.

The nickname began as a practical label, to tell this symphony apart from Schubert's shorter Sixth, the "Little" C major. It has long since been taken as a description. The number is less settled. English-

speaking countries call the work No. 9. The New Schubert Edition counts it as No. 8, and that is the number the Berliner Philharmoniker print for these concerts. It is the same piece.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Andante, Allegro ma non troppo. Two horns, alone and quiet, play the opening melody. It sounds like a slow introduction, but Schubert builds the whole movement on it, and its first three rising notes turn up throughout the symphony. The fast section arrives without a break, driven by dotted rhythms in the strings and chattering triplets in the woodwinds. Listen for the trombones, which Schubert treats as melody instruments: a soft, mysterious call from them sits at the heart of the movement. At the very end the horn theme returns, shouted out by the full orchestra.

II. Andante con moto. A walking movement in A minor. Over a steady tread in the strings the oboe sings a tune that is half march, half folk song. It alternates with a warmer, consoling melody in the major. The plan could not be simpler, the two ideas heard in turn and then in turn again, but the second time round the passage that links them is drawn out and developed at length.

III. Scherzo: Allegro vivace. A big, stamping dance, worked out at much greater length than a scherzo usually is: it is a complete sonata-form movement in itself. Several of its tunes really waltz. The broad central trio moves to A major.

IV. Finale: Allegro vivace. Two calls to attention, one dotted and one in triplets, launch a movement of enormous span and energy. The second theme starts from four repeated notes in the horns and turns into a swinging march, and those four notes come to dominate everything that follows. In the middle of the movement the woodwinds briefly recall the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, first performed in Vienna in 1824. The return of the opening comes in the wrong key, E-flat, before the music works its way home, and the long coda moves from darkness into a blaze of C major.

Tonight's artists

Christian Gerhaher *baritone*

Christian Gerhaher sings both vocal works in the first half, and they belong together: two solitary figures in front of a landscape, one by a lake in autumn and one by the sea at dusk. Mahler's score expressly allows a baritone to take the alto's part in "Der Einsame im Herbst". The Diepenbrock, written three years earlier by a friend of Mahler's, is presented by the orchestra as a discovery. Both pieces depend on what Gerhaher is known for as a song recitalist: quiet singing in which every word registers. These concerts are also Markus Poschner's first with the Berliner Philharmoniker.

Christian Gerhaher is a German baritone regarded as one of the supreme song interpreters of his generation, celebrated above all in Schubert and Schumann with his longtime pianist Gerold Huber, and equally distinguished on the opera stage. Trained in Munich (he also studied medicine), he is prized for the searching intelligence and tonal beauty he brings to text. In the War Requiem he joins the tenor for Owen's English poems set against the chamber orchestra, duets in which two soldiers' voices, German and English, recall the carnage and finally, as the dead, reconcile in 'Strange Meeting.'

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Schubert**

Christopher H. Gibbs, Cambridge University Press 2000

A short, readable life that clears away the legends, including the old belief that the Great C major Symphony was a work of Schubert's last year.

ACCESSIBLE **Gustav Mahler**

Jens Malte Fischer, Yale University Press 2013

A full modern biography with a chapter on each major work; its account of 1907 and 1908 is the background to *Das Lied von der Erde*, and it covers Mahler's Dutch friendships.

DEEPER **Schubert: The Music and the Man**

Brian Newbould, University of California Press 1999

Newbould, who has edited and completed Schubert's unfinished symphonies, writes about the Great C major with a detailed knowledge of the sources and of how it was put together.

SOURCES

1. Markus Poschner and Christian Gerhaher, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/57111/>
2. Markus Poschner and Christian Gerhaher, Digital Concert Hall. <https://www.digitalconcert-hall.com/en/concert/57111>
3. Das Lied von der Erde, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Das_Lied_von_der_Erde
4. Programme Note: Das Lied von der Erde, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/gustav-mahler-das-lied-von-der-erde/>
5. Alphons Diepenbrock: Im großen Schweigen (1905), preface to the study score, Musikproduktion Höflich (Repertoire Explorer). https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/wp-content/uploads/vorworte_prefaces/4485.html
6. Composers Datebook: Alfons Diepenbrock, YourClassical (American Public Media). <https://www.yourclassical.org/episode/2019/05/20/alfons-diepenbrock>
7. Diepenbrock, Dr. Alphonsus Joannes Maria (entry in Casper Höweler, X-Y-Z der muziek), DBNL (Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren). https://www.dbnl.org/tekst/howe003xyzd01_01/howe003xyzd01_01_0156.php
8. The Dawn of Day, by Friedrich Nietzsche (translated by J. M. Kennedy), Project Gutenberg. <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/39955>
9. Alphons Diepenbrock, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alphons_Diepenbrock
10. Symphony No. 9 (Schubert), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_\(Schubert\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._9_(Schubert))
11. Franz Schubert: Symphony No. 9 in C Major, D. 944, 'The Great' (programme note by Steven Ledbetter), Aspen Music Festival and School. https://aspenmusicfestival.com/program_notes/view/schubert-symphony-no.-9-in-c-major-d.-944-the-great
12. Schubert: Symphony No. 9 Program Note (by Ross Amico), Princeton Symphony Orchestra. <https://princetonsymphony.org/schubert-symphony-no-9-program-note>
13. Markus Poschner, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Markus_Poschner
14. About Markus Poschner, Markus Poschner. <https://markusposchner.de/about-markus-poschner>
15. The Life of Schubert, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521595124>
16. Gustav Mahler, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300194111>
17. Schubert: The Music and the Man, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780520219571>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-02-18-poschner>

Version 1, 7 October 2026