

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Gustavo Dudamel conducts Mahler's Seventh Symphony

Thursday, April 15, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Gustavo Dudamel, conductor

approximately 80 minutes

Gustav Mahler

1860–1911

Symphony No. 7 in E minor

80 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Mahler wrote his Seventh Symphony from the inside out. In the summer of 1904, at his lakeside villa at Maiernigg in Carinthia, he was finishing the Sixth, the darkest of his symphonies. In the same weeks he also wrote two slow, mysterious movements that he called *Nachtmusik* (night music), with no idea yet of what would surround them.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Langsam, Allegro risoluto. Over a dragging, dotted rhythm in the low strings, the stroke of the oars, a tenor horn plays the opening call. It is an instrument rarely seen in a symphony orchestra, and its hollow, penetrating

tone colours the whole introduction. The fast main section drives hard in E minor. Its second theme, a long, yearning violin melody, later opens out into the stillest passage of the movement, a hushed chorale that swells to a luminous climax.

II. Nachtmusik I. Two horns call to each other, one answering like an echo, and a night march begins, with woodwind birdcalls and cowbells heard from offstage. Mahler is said to have thought of Rembrandt's *Night Watch*, which he had seen in Amsterdam. Major and minor keep changing places, so that the march never quite settles into cheerfulness or gloom.

III. Scherzo. The marking is *Schattenhaft*, shadowy. Timpani and low strings trade single notes, scurrying strings fill in a haze, and a waltz twice tries to get going and falls apart. This is the centre of the symphony, and its strangest music.

IV. Nachtmusik II. Marked *Andante amoroso*, this is a serenade for a much smaller orchestra, with a guitar and a mandolin strumming among the strings. A solo violin sets the tone with a tender little refrain. Alma Mahler connected the movement with the poetry of Eichendorff and its murmuring springs.

V. Rondo-Finale. A volley of timpani throws the doors open on daylight. The main theme, in blazing C major, nods to the festive music of Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*, and it keeps coming back between abrupt changes of scene, in what has been heard both as celebration and as parody. Near the end the main theme of the first movement returns in the brass, bells and cowbells join in, and the symphony finishes in a blaze of noise.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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