

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Mäkelä Conducts Verklärte Nacht and Mahler's Seventh

Sunday, April 11, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SCHOENBERG 1874–1951 <i>Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (version for string orchestra)</i>	27'
2	MAHLER 1860–1911 <i>Symphony No. 7 in E minor</i>	80'
TOTAL MUSIC		107'

Arnold Schoenberg

1874–1951

Verklärte Nacht, Op. 4 (version for string orchestra)

27 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Verklärte Nacht ('Transfigured Night') is the piece by which most concertgoers first meet Schoenberg, and it comes from before any of the things he is famous for. He wrote it in 1899, aged 25, as a string sextet, by most accounts in about three

weeks. Atonality was nearly a decade away and the twelve-note method more than two. The language is the late Romantic one he had grown up with, and its two parents are easy to hear: Wagner, above all *Tristan und Isolde*, in the restless harmony and the recurring motifs, and Brahms in the way every theme is worked, varied and combined with the others.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The music runs for nearly half an hour without a break and follows the five stanzas of the poem: the walk, the woman's confession, the walk again, the man's reply, and the walk transfigured.

It begins with the walk: a slow, heavy tread on a repeated low D with a falling line above it, cold and dark. The confession is the longest and most turbulent part. Listen for the agitated, sighing figures that pile up as the woman speaks, and for the solo violin and viola that emerge from the body of strings, a reminder of the piece's chamber origins. Her section ends in something close to collapse, and the walking music returns, louder and more desolate than before.

Then comes the turn on which the whole piece depends. After a pause the cellos begin a warm, broad melody in D major: the man's answer. From this point the harmony settles, the textures lighten, and themes that sounded an-

guished in the first half come back transformed. Muted strings, harmonics and rippling arpeggios stand for the shimmering night the man describes.

In the closing pages the opening tread returns one last time, now in the major and high up, over glittering figuration, and the music fades out on a long D major chord.

Gustav Mahler

1860–1911

Symphony No. 7 in E minor

80 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Mahler's Seventh was written back to front. In the summer of 1904, at his lakeside villa at Maiernigg on the Wörthersee in Carinthia, he finished the Sixth Symphony and, alongside it, sketched two slow-ish character pieces that he called *Nachtmusik*, night music. They became the second and fourth movements of a symphony that did not yet have a beginning. When he came back the following summer to supply one, nothing would come. He went walking in the Dolomites to shake the block loose and returned without an idea. Then, as he told the story later, he got into the boat to be rowed across the lake, and at the first stroke of the oars the rhythm and character of

the opening came to him. He claimed to have written the first, third and fifth movements in four weeks; scholars think six or seven more likely. The score is dated 15 August 1905.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. Over a slow, lurching rhythm in the strings (the oar strokes), a tenor horn sings out a dark, angular melody. It is a band instrument, rarely seen in an orchestra, and Mahler uses it only here. The introduction speeds up into a fierce march in E minor led by the horns. In the middle of the movement everything stops for a vision: high violins, harp glissandos and soft trumpet fanfares, as though a window had opened. The march returns and ends in a hard, bright E major.

Second movement (Nachtmusik I). Two horns call to each other, the second muted to sound far away. Bird calls in the woodwind grow into a clatter, and then a march sets off, swinging between major and minor every few beats. Listen for cowbells in the distance and for the violins tapping the strings with the wood of the bow.

Third movement. Mahler marks the scherzo 'shadowy'. Timpani and plucked basses trade single notes, and out of them spins a ghostly waltz that keeps tripping, shrieking and falling apart. The trio offers a few bars of plain rustic melody before the shadows close in again.

Fourth movement (Nachtmusik II). A serenade, marked Andante amoroso. A solo violin leans into the opening phrase, and a guitar and a mandolin join the orchestra, which has lost its trumpets, trombones and tuba. The horn has the main tune. It is the gentlest music in the symphony, though the harmony clouds over more than once.

Fifth movement. Timpani hammer out a solo and the brass answer with a fanfare in C major. The refrain keeps returning between episodes that change speed and character without warning: a mincing, old-fashioned dance, rowdy rustic tunes, passages that sound like Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*. Near the end the march theme from the first movement breaks in, first in the minor and then turned to the major, and bells and cowbells ring through the closing pages.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-04-11-makela>

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