

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Rattle Conducts Mahler's Third Symphony

Sunday, April 18, 2027 · 19:00 · Barbican

Sir Simon Rattle, conductor · Beth Taylor, mezzo-soprano · London
Symphony Chorus, choir · Tiffin Boys' Choir, choir

approximately 100 minutes

Gustav Mahler

1860–1911

Symphony No. 3 in D minor

100 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Mahler's Third is the longest symphony he wrote, and the longest that orchestras play with any regularity: six movements, around an hour and forty minutes, with a mezzo-soprano, a women's chorus and a boys' choir who sing for barely a quarter of an hour between them. He sketched ideas for it from 1893 and did the main work in the summers of 1895 and 1896 at Steinbach am Attersee, in the Austrian lake district where he spent his holidays. The rest of the year belonged to the opera house in Hamburg, where he was chief conductor.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement. Eight horns in unison open the symphony with a striding tune that many listeners find close to the big theme in the finale of Brahms's First. What follows takes more than half an hour, as long as the next four movements together. Two kinds of music alternate. One is heavy and slow, with growling brass, drum strokes and long recitatives for solo trombone: inert nature, in Mahler's scheme, before life stirs. The other is a march that starts far off in the woodwind and comes nearer each time, picking up piccolos, side drums and brass-band swagger until summer arrives in a riot. Near the end of the central section, snare drums placed offstage rattle on their own before the eight horns bring back the opening. Mahler asks for a long pause when the movement is over.

Second movement. A minuet led off by the oboe, light and graceful, with quicker episodes that blow through it like gusts across a field.

Third movement. The scherzo is built on one of Mahler's own early songs, 'Ablösung im Sommer', about the cuckoo's death and the nightingale who takes over the singing. Twice the bustle stops and a posthorn, played from offstage, sings a slow and distant melody over

hushed strings. Near the end something like panic breaks out before the music gathers itself and gallops to the close.

Fourth movement. The mezzo-soprano sings the ‘Midnight Song’ from Nietzsche’s *Also sprach Zarathustra*: ‘O Mensch! Gib Acht!’ (‘O Man! Take heed!’). The orchestra barely moves, rocking between two notes, and the oboe keeps sliding upward in a cry like a night bird’s.

Fifth movement. It follows without a break, and the mood flips. The boys imitate bells (‘Bimm, bamm’) while the women sing a poem from the folk collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, ‘Es sungen drei Engel’ (‘Three angels were singing’), about Peter’s sins being forgiven. The soloist joins in as the penitent.

Sixth movement. Again there is no pause. The strings begin a broad, quiet melody in D major, and for some twenty-five minutes Mahler lets it grow, with interruptions that recall the anguish of the first movement. After the last of these a flute and piccolo are left almost alone; then the brass take up the theme as a soft chorale and the whole orchestra builds to an ending of repeated D major chords, with two timpanists pounding in step.

Tonight's artists

Beth Taylor *mezzo-soprano*

Beth Taylor has the symphony's one solo part: Nietzsche's 'Midnight Song' in the fourth movement, and a few lines as the penitent among the angels in the fifth. These are Sir Simon Rattle's last concerts of the LSO's 2026/27 season at the Barbican, given on 18 and 20 April with no interval. On 24 April the orchestra, Rattle and Taylor take the symphony to the Wiener Konzerthaus, where the women of the Wiener Singakademie and the Wiener Sängerknaben sing the choral parts.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

Only the women of the London Symphony Chorus are needed, and only for the fifth movement, where they sing the Wunderhorn poem 'Es sungen drei Engel' against the boys' bell sounds.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

Tiffin Boys' Choir *choir*

Mahler gives the boys the sound of bells, a repeated 'Bimm, bamm' above the women's voices in the fifth movement; the two London performances are sung by the Tiffin Boys' Choir.

The Tiffin Boys' Choir is the choir of Tiffin School, a boys' grammar school in Kingston upon Thames in south-west London. Founded in 1957, it appears with the London orchestras and at the Royal Opera House, the Royal Festival Hall and the Barbican whenever a score calls for boys' voices.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2027-04-18-rattle>

Version 1, 7 October 2026