

Symphony of a Thousand

Saturday, May 9, 2026 · 15:00 · Wiener Konzerthaus

Andris Nelsons, conductor · Jacquelyn Wagner, soprano · Sarah Wegener, soprano · Ying Fang, soprano · Wiebke Lehmkuhl, alto · Tamara Mumford, mezzo-soprano · Benjamin Bruns, tenor · Michael Nagy, baritone · Tareq Nazmi, bass · Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, chorus · Wiener Sängerknaben (Vienna Boys Choir), chorus

approximately 85 minutes

Gustav Mahler

85 minutes

1860–1911

Symphony No. 8 in E-flat major

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Part I, the hymn ‘Veni creator spiritus’, begins with no introduction at all: the organ sounds and the full chorus erupts immediately on the word ‘Veni’ (‘Come!’), a cry of summoning that sets the tone for everything to follow. This is the symphony’s most overtly symphonic stretch: Mahler treats the hymn almost like a vast sonata movement, with the choral lines functioning as themes that are stated, developed, combined, and recapitulated. Listen for the great striding subject heard at the start and for how it returns, transformed, to crown the part. A central, quieter passage on the words ‘Infirma nostri corporis’ (‘the weakness of our body’) pleads more tenderly, the soloists weaving above the chorus, before the music regathers its force. The part climaxes with a tremendous double fugue and a final ‘Gloria’, the offstage brass blazing out and the boys’ voices ringing on top as the spirit is hailed in triumph.

Part II could hardly be more different. It opens with a long orchestral prelude, dark, hushed and searching, depicting the rocky mountain gorges where holy hermits dwell, all murmuring low strings and bare, suspended harmonies. Out of this stillness the music builds by slow degrees. Listen for the solo voices of the hermits emerging from the landscape, the baritone’s ecstatic song and the bass’s surging plea, with Doctor Marianus’s tenor later soaring above; then for the chorus of angels bearing aloft the immortal part of Faust, and the limpid, high-floating entry of the boys’ choir as the younger angels. A radiant orches-

tral passage announces the appearance of the Mater Gloriosa, and a soprano sings the penitent's prayer of intercession with melting tenderness. Throughout, notice how Mahler keeps thinning his enormous apparatus down to a few solo lines and a thread of harmony, so that the final ascent feels earned. That ascent is the Chorus Mysticus, 'Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis' ('All that is transient is but a parable'), which begins as the merest whisper, almost inaudible, and grows over several minutes into the most overwhelming sound in all of Mahler. As the words 'das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan' ('the Eternal Feminine draws us upward') ring out, the offstage brass return and the whole vast assembly blazes into a final E-flat major chord of pure, transfiguring light. Let it carry you; it is meant to.



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