

Resurrection

Saturday, July 25, 2026 · 20:30 · Großes Festspielhaus

Gustavo Dudamel, conductor · Ying Fang, soprano · Nadezhda Karyazina, mezzo-soprano · Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, chorus

approximately 85 minutes

Gustav Mahler

1860–1911

85 minutes

Symphony No. 2 in C minor ('Resurrection')

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

Mahler's Second Symphony is the work in which he first staked out the territory that would define him: the symphony as a question about death and what, if anything, lies beyond it. He began it in 1888 with a single enormous movement, a symphonic funeral march he called 'Totenfeier' ('Funeral Rites'). For a time he was unsure whether it was the opening of a symphony at all, and he set it aside, completing the work only in stages over the next six years. The remaining movements came in 1893 and 1894, and the full five-movement sym-

phony reached its premiere in Berlin on 13 December 1895, with Mahler himself conducting. It became one of the most popular and successful of his works during his lifetime.

The symphony grew out of a problem Mahler could not solve in the abstract. He had written his funeral march and stood, as he put it, at the coffin of the hero of his First Symphony, asking the oldest questions: Why have you lived? Why have you suffered? Is it all only a vast, terrifying joke? For years he searched for a finale that could answer those questions without lapsing into either empty consolation or mere noise. The answer arrived, famously, at a funeral: the memorial service in 1894 for the conductor Hans von Bülow, where Mahler heard a choir sing a setting of Klopstock's hymn 'Die Auferstehung' ('The Resurrection'). 'It struck me like lightning,' he wrote, 'and everything was revealed to me clear and plain.' He took Klopstock's opening stanzas, added verses of his own that pushed the poem beyond conventional piety toward a more personal vision of universal redemption, and built around them the choral finale the whole symphony had been waiting for.

The shape that resulted is deliberately strange. After the vast, tragic first movement, Mahler asks in the score for a pause of at least five minutes before the music resumes, a real silence to let the gravity of the funeral rites settle before the symphony turns to memory and doubt. The three middle movements are smaller in scale and human in tone: a gracious, backward-glancing ländler; a bitter, swirling scherzo built from one of Mahler's own Wunderhorn songs; and then, breaking the orchestral spell entirely, the brief alto song 'Urlicht' ('Primal Light'), a moment of childlike faith sung as if from the edge of heaven. Only after this does the enormous finale arrive: a vast movement that travels from apocalypse, through the summoning of the dead, to a final chorale of resurrection.

The forces are correspondingly huge. Mahler calls for an expanded orchestra with a large brass and percussion battery, an offstage band of horns and trumpets that sounds across a great distance in the finale, a soprano and an alto soloist, and a full mixed chorus held in reserve until the symphony's closing minutes. The drama of the final movement turns partly on space and partly on patience: distant fanfares and a long-awaited 'Great Summons', the bird-call of a solo flute over silence, and then the almost unbearable hush from which the chorus first enters. Few composers have understood as well as Mahler that the loudest effect in music can be a sudden quiet.

What the Second offers is not a doctrine but a trajectory. Mahler, who was born Jewish, converted to Catholicism in 1897, and remained all his life a restless seeker rather than a believer of any settled kind, was not writing a confession of faith. The 'resurrection' he stages is closer to a hard-won conviction that suffering and striving are not finally wasted, and that, as his own added verses insist, nothing is lost, and everything that has lived and longed will rise again transfigured. The symphony earns that affirmation by refusing to grant it cheaply: it spends a full hour in the territory of grief, irony, and unanswered questions before the light arrives. That is why the ending, when it comes, can feel less like a happy conclusion than like a deliverance.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement: Allegro maestoso ('Totenfeier'). The symphony opens in the grave. Low strings attack a tremolando, and out of it rises a grim, march-like funeral music in C minor, jagged and severe: the rites over Mahler's fallen hero. Listen for the contrast between this stern march and the consoling second theme, a warm, song-like melody that keeps trying to offer comfort and keeps being driven back. The movement is built as a struggle between these worlds, rising to shattering climaxes, and it ends not in resolution but with a bleak downward rush into silence. Mahler then asks for a long pause before the music can go on.

Second movement: Andante moderato. A complete change of air: a gentle, swaying ländler, a remembered dance from happier days. This is the symphony looking back tenderly at a life now ended. Listen for the music's grace and lilt, ruffled twice by darker, more agitated episodes with rustling string figures, before it settles back into its untroubled glow. It is the one moment of unguarded sweetness in the work.

Third movement: In ruhig fließender Bewegung (Scherzo). Without warning the mood curdles. Built from Mahler's own song of St Anthony preaching to the fishes (who listen, admire the sermon, and swim off unchanged), this scherzo is a perpetual-motion swirl that turns the world's bustle into something hollow and faintly nightmarish. Listen for the mocking woodwind cries and the way the music spins faster and faster, until it erupts in a sudden, terrifying shriek of despair before subsiding. This is doubt at its most corrosive.

Fourth movement: 'Urlicht' (Sehr feierlich, aber schlicht).

Out of that despair comes the alto's voice, alone at first: 'O Röschen rot!' ('O little red rose!'). This brief Wunderhorn song, 'Primal Light', is a moment of pure, childlike faith, the soul declaring that it comes from God and will return to God. Listen for the solemn brass chorale that answers the voice and for the music's utter simplicity; after the scherzo's vertigo, it is like a candle lit in the dark.

Fifth movement: Im Tempo des Scherzos (Finale). The longest movement crashes in with a cry of horror, then opens onto a vast landscape. Listen for the offstage brass sounding from a distance, the solo flute and piccolo singing like a bird over silence, and the marching of the dead toward judgement. The 'Great Summons' rings out, and then, at the moment of apocalypse, the chorus enters not in thunder but in the barest whisper, 'Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du' ('Rise again, yes, you shall rise again'). From that hush the music builds, gathering soprano, alto, chorus, organ, and bells, to a final blaze of resurrection. Wait for the quiet entry; everything depends on it.

Tonight's artists

Ying Fang *soprano*

The soprano is held in reserve until the symphony's final movement, where she joins the alto and the hushed chorus in the Resurrection chorale. Her line rises high and luminous above the texture. Mahler asks for purity and floating ease rather than power, a voice that seems to come from somewhere above the great mass of sound as the music climbs toward its transfiguration.

Ying Fang, born in Ningbo, China, in 1987, is a soprano celebrated for the silvery purity and ease of her lyric voice. She studied at the Shanghai Conservatory and then at the Juilliard School, and has become a principal soprano at the Metropolitan Opera, where her roles include Ilia in Mozart's *Idomeneo*. In concert she has sung Mahler, Mendelssohn and Orff with orchestras such as the Chicago Symphony. Her bright, floating upper register suits the high, angelic lines Mahler asks of his sopranos in the Eighth.

Nadezhda Karyazina *mezzo-soprano*

Hers is the voice that breaks the symphony's spell of doubt. In the fourth movement, 'Urlicht', she sings alone, 'O Röschen rot!', a brief song of childlike faith that asks not for display but for absolute stillness and a true alto warmth: the soul speaking quietly of its longing to return to God, a candle lit before the great finale. In the closing movement she joins the soprano and chorus in the Resurrection chorale.

Nadezhda Karyazina is a Russian-Swiss mezzo-soprano, born in Moscow, who studied at the Russian Academy of Theatre Arts there and then joined the Bolshoi Theatre's Young Artists Programme. From 2013 to 2015 she was a Jette Parker Young Artist at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, and she went on to ensemble years at the Hamburg State Opera (2015 to 2020) and Zurich Opera (2020 to 2023), singing roles from Carmen to Rossini's Isabella. A prizewinner at Operalia and Neue Stimmen, she received the Herbert von Karajan Prize in 2025. Her voice is prized for the richness of its low register, qualities that suit the grave, inward simplicity Mahler asks of the alto in 'Urlicht'.

Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien *chorus*

At the climax of the finale the chorus enters not in thunder but in a barely audible hush ('Aufersteh'n, ja aufersteh'n wirst du'), the most arresting effect in the work, from which the whole resurrection is built.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Mahler Remembered**

Norman Lebrecht, Faber and Faber 2011

Mahler seen through the recollections of people who knew him, a human portrait of the composer who wrote the 'Resurrection' Symphony.

ACCESSIBLE **Gustav Mahler**

Jens Malte Fischer, Yale University Press 2013

A full and readable single-volume life of Mahler, including the Hamburg years in which he completed the Second Symphony.

DEEPER **Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies**

Constantin Floros, Amadeus Press 2003

A detailed study of all the symphonies, with a close reading of the Second's programme and its path from funeral rite to resurrection.

SOURCES

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2. Gustavo Dudamel und die Wiener Philharmoniker mit Mahler in Salzburg (review of 25 July 2026), Bachtrack. <https://bachtrack.com/kritik-mahler-dudamel-wiener-philharmoniker-singverein-ying-fang-karyazina-salzburger-festspiele-juli-2026>
3. Nadezhda Karyazina: Mahler's Resurrection at the Salzburg Festival, Centre Stage Artist Management. <https://centrestagemanagement.com/en/news/nadezhda-karyazina/nadezhda-karyazina-mahlers-auferstehung-bei-den-salzburger-festspielen/>
4. Symphony No. 2 (Mahler), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_\(Mahler\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_(Mahler))
5. Mahler's Symphony No. 2, 'Resurrection' Program Notes, Jacksonville Symphony. <https://www.jaxsymphony.org/mahler-2-program-notes/>
6. Mahler Notes by Michael Steinberg, Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. <https://msomn.org/mahler-2-note-by-michael-steinberg/>
7. Gustav Mahler, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Mahler
8. Gustavo Dudamel, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Dudamel
9. Gustavo Dudamel, Music & Artistic Director, New York Philharmonic. <https://www.nyphil.org/about-us/artists/gustavo-dudamel>
10. Nadezhda Karyazina, biography, Centre Stage Artist Management. https://centrestagemanagement.com/en/artists/mezzo_soprano/nadezhda-karyazina/
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12. Mahler Remembered, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780571272778>
13. Gustav Mahler, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300194111>
14. Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781574670257>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-07-25-dudamel>

Version 3, 30 September 2026