

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

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

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

85 minutes

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 symphony

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.

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, child-like 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.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

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