

Resurrection in the Golden Hall

Saturday, February 20, 2027 · 15:30 · Musikverein

Yannick Nézet-Séguin, conductor · Christiane Karg, soprano · Elīna Garanča, mezzo-soprano · Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien, chorus

approximately 85 minutes

Gustav Mahler

85 minutes

1860–1911

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

Gustav Mahler's Second Symphony took him six years, and for most of that time he did not know how it would end. In 1888 he completed a large funeral march for orchestra and called it Totenfeier (Funeral Rites). For five years he could not decide whether it was a symphonic poem in its own right or the first movement of a symphony. When he moved to Hamburg in 1891 as conductor at the opera he played it on

the piano to Hans von Bülow, the most eminent conductor in the city, who admired Mahler's conducting. Bülow was appalled by the piece and said that if this was music, he understood nothing about music.

In the summer of 1893 Mahler added two middle movements, a gentle dance and a scherzo that reworks one of his songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, the collection of German folk poetry. He knew he wanted a finale with voices and knew the comparison with Beethoven's Ninth that this would invite. What he did not have was a text.

Bülow died early in 1894. At the memorial service in Hamburg a choir sang a setting of the Resurrection hymn by the eighteenth-century poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, and Mahler later wrote that it struck him like lightning. He used the opening stanzas of Klopstock's hymn and continued the text with verses of his own. The finale was written that spring and summer, the first movement was revised, and the short *Wunderhorn* song "Urlicht" (Primal Light) was placed before the finale as a fourth movement. By the end of 1894 the score was complete.

Mahler conducted the first complete performance in Berlin on 13 December 1895. The symphony takes its nickname, Resurrection, from the hymn. Mahler wrote out a story for it more than once: a hero is carried to his grave, his life is remembered, doubt takes hold, and at last comes the summons to judgement and the promise of new life. He later withdrew these explanations, as he did with all his programmes, but they describe the course of the music accurately enough.

The forces are very large: an orchestra with ten horns and offstage brass and percussion, an organ, soprano and alto soloists and a mixed chorus.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The first movement begins with a shudder in the upper strings and a fierce, striding theme in the cellos and basses. It is a funeral march on a symphonic scale, relieved now and then by a quiet, rising melody in the violins.

The second movement looks back to happier times, an unhurried country dance in the manner of a *Ländler*, led by the strings. The third is the scherzo drawn from Mahler's song about St Anthony of Padua preaching to the fishes. Its rolling, circular motion goes on and on until the orchestra breaks out in a dissonant cry, and the music sinks away.

The alto then begins “Urlicht” with the words “O Röschen rot”, over a soft chorale. It lasts only a few minutes and is the stillest point in the symphony.

The finale bursts in with the same cry and then unfolds as a long sequence of scenes. Horns call from offstage. There are marches and a chorale. Then comes what Mahler called the Great Summons: brass from a distance, and in the hall a solitary flute, like a bird. After a silence the chorus enters, at first almost unaccompanied and as quietly as it can sing: “Aufersteh’n”, rise again. The soprano’s voice lifts out of the choral sound, the alto and soprano sing Mahler’s own verses, and the music builds in stages to the closing hymn, with organ and bells joining the full orchestra.

Tonight’s artists

Christiane Karg *soprano*

The soprano has little to sing and all of it exposed: she rises out of the hushed chorus in the finale and later joins the alto in Mahler’s own verses. Karg has sung the part before, among other occasions at the Rheingau Musik Festival in 2017, and a week earlier she is the orchestra’s soloist in Mahler’s Fourth.

Christiane Karg is a German soprano, born in Feuchtwangen in Bavaria in 1980. She studied at the Mozarteum in Salzburg and made her Salzburg Festival debut in 2006 while still a student, in two early Mozart works. From 2008 she was a member of the Frankfurt Opera ensemble, where her roles included Susanna, Pamina, Zdenka in *Ara-bella* and Debussy’s *Mélisande*. She has since sung lyric soprano parts at houses including the Royal Opera House, La Scala and the Bavarian State Opera, and she is equally active as a concert and Lieder singer. She is artistic director of the KunstKlang festival in her home town.

Elīna Garanča *mezzo-soprano*

Garanča sings the alto part: the solo song “Urlicht” that forms the fourth movement, and her entries in the finale. She appears in all three Musikverein performances and in the orchestra’s New York concert of the symphony on 28 February.

Elīna Garanča is a Latvian mezzo-soprano, born in Riga in 1976 into a family of musicians. She studied singing at the Latvian Academy of Music and began her career in the opera companies of Meiningen and Frankfurt. She is closely identified with the title role of Bizet’s *Carmen*, which she has sung at the Metropolitan Opera, the Royal Opera House and the Vienna State Opera among other houses, and the Vienna State Opera has named her a *Kammersängerin*. She has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon since 2005.

Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien *chorus*

The Singverein, the resident choir of the Musikverein, sings in the three Vienna performances on 20, 21 and 22 February. The orchestra’s own listing for the Carnegie Hall performance on 28 February names the two soloists but no chorus.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis

Stuart Feder, Yale University Press 2004

Feder, a psychoanalyst, reads Mahler’s life through its crises, including the years in Hamburg and the death of Bülow that unlocked the finale of the Second.

ACCESSIBLE Mahler: His Life, Work and World

Kurt Blaukopf, Herta Blaukopf, Thames & Hudson 2000

A life told through letters, reviews and photographs of the time, good on how the early symphonies were first received.

DEEPER Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies

Constantin Floros, Amadeus Press 2003

Floros takes each symphony movement by movement and sets out the programmes Mahler wrote for the Second and then withdrew.

SOURCES

1. 6th Subscription Concert, 20 February 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/6th-subscription-concert/10866/>
2. 6th Subscription Concert, 21 February 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/6th-subscription-concert/10867/>
3. Concert of the Society of Friends of Music in Vienna, 22 February 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-of-the-society-of-friends-of-music-in-vienna/10977/>

Gustav Mahler ·Symphony No. 2 in C minor ('Resurrection')

4. Concert in New York, 28 February 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/concert-in-new-york/10964/>
5. Yannick will conduct Mahler's complete symphonies cycle in 2026-2027, Yannick Nézet-Séguin. <https://yannicknezetseguin.com/en/news/detail/yannick-will-conduct-mahler-s-complete-symphonies-cycle-in-2026-2027/>
6. Symphony No. 2 (Mahler), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_\(Mahler\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._2_(Mahler))
7. Mahler Notes by Michael Steinberg, Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra. <https://msomn.org/mahler-2-note-by-michael-steinberg/>
8. Mahler's Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection" Program Notes, Jacksonville Symphony. <https://www.jaxsymphony.org/mahler-2-program-notes/>
9. Christiane Karg, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christiane_Karg
10. Elina Garanča, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El%C4%ABna_Garan%C4%8Da
11. About, Elina Garanča. <https://elinagaranca.com/about/>
12. Elina Garanča: Biography, Deutsche Grammophon. <https://www.deutschegrammophon.com/en/artists/elina-garanca/biography>
13. Gustav Mahler, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustav_Mahler
14. Gustav Mahler: A Life in Crisis, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300103403>
15. Mahler: His Life, Work and World, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780500281970>
16. Gustav Mahler: The Symphonies, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781574670257>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-02-20-nezet-seguin>

Version 1, 7 October 2026