

BBC
Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus



ORAMO CONDUCTS MAHLER

Thursday 26 September 2024

barbican
Associate Orchestra

RADIO **3** SOUNDS

BBC
**Symphony
Orchestra
& Chorus**

SAKARI ORAMO
CHIEF CONDUCTOR

Feel the Music

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus at the Barbican

THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 7.30pm

Oromo conducts Mahler

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 6

Sakari Oromo *conductor*

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 7.30pm

Bartók's Third Piano Concerto

UNSUK CHIN Alaraph 'Ritual of the Heartbeat' *London premiere*

BÉLA BARTÓK Piano

Concerto No. 3

CLAUDE DEBUSSY La mer

MAURICE RAVEL Boléro

Dinis Sousa *conductor*

Bertrand Chamayou *piano*

FRIDAY 25 OCTOBER 7.30pm

Huang Ruo's 'M. Butterfly'

HUANG RUO M. Butterfly

UK premiere

Cast:

Kangmin Justin Kim, Mark Stone,

Fleur Barron, Kevin Burdette

BBC Singers

Carolyn Kuan *conductor*

James Robinson *stage director*

FRIDAY 1 NOVEMBER 7.30pm

Gerstein plays Busoni's Piano Concerto

GRAŻYNA BACEWICZ

Symphony No. 2

FERRUCCIO BUSONI Piano

Concerto

Sakari Oromo *conductor*

Kirill Gerstein *piano*

BBC Symphony Chorus (lower voices)

FRIDAY 8 NOVEMBER 7.30pm

Oromo conducts Strauss and Wagner

DORA PEJAČEVIĆ Overture for Orchestra

KAROL SZYMANOWSKI Violin Concerto No. 1

RICHARD WAGNER Siegfried Idyll

RICHARD STRAUSS Death and Transfiguration

Sakari Oromo *conductor*

Ilya Gringolts *violin*

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER 7.30pm

Haydn and Strauss: 'Nelson Mass' and 'A Hero's Life'

SAMY MOUSSA Elysium

JOSEPH HAYDN Mass in D minor, 'Nelson'

RICHARD STRAUSS Ein Heldenleben

Hannu Lintu *conductor*

Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha *soprano*

Jennifer Johnston *mezzo-soprano*

Derek Welton *bass-baritone*

BBC Symphony Chorus

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER 7.30pm

Yeol Eum Son plays Prokofiev

JAMES LEE III Sukkot Through Orion's Nebula *UK premiere*

SERGEY PROKOFIEV Piano

Concerto No. 2

OTTORINO RESPIGHI Fountains of Rome; Pines of Rome

Jonathon Heyward *conductor*

Yeol Eum Son *piano*

FRIDAY 13 DECEMBER 7.30pm

Elgar's 'The Dream of Gerontius'

EDWARD ELGAR The Dream of Gerontius

Sakari Oromo *conductor*

Dame Sarah Connolly *mezzo-soprano*

Nicky Spence *tenor*

Roderick Williams *baritone*

BBC Symphony Chorus

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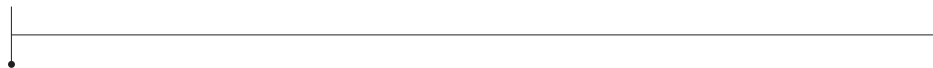
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THURSDAY 26 SEPTEMBER, 2024

7.30pm, BARBICAN HALL



GUSTAV MAHLER Symphony No. 6 in A minor 83'

Sakari Oramo conductor

There will be no interval

RADIO 3 SOUNDS

This concert is being broadcast live by BBC Radio 3 in *Radio 3 in Concert*. It will be available for 30 days after broadcast via BBC Sounds, where you can also find podcasts and music mixes.

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With the Last Night of the Proms still less than two weeks in the past, the BBC Symphony Orchestra and its Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo return to launch the orchestra's 2024/5 season – Oramo's 12th full season at the helm.

Mahler himself suggested the nickname 'Tragic' for his Sixth Symphony and it's easy to hear why, since the work is full of turbulence, with an unmistakable element of violence. Mahler calls on a vast orchestra – a fact that was caricatured in his day – including not only celesta and cowbells but also a mighty hammer, which delivers the famous 'blows of fate' at the end of the symphony. The conclusion may be a tragic one but there are also scenes of beauty and joy in a work that includes a glowing theme associated with Mahler's wife, Alma.

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GUSTAV MAHLER (1860–1911)

Symphony No. 6 in A minor

(1903–4, rev. 1906)

1 Allegro energico

2 Scherzo: Wuchtig [Massive]

3 Andante moderato

4 Finale: Sostenuto – Allegro moderato

The Sixth Symphony – the ‘Tragic’, the name under which it appeared when Mahler conducted it in Vienna – dates from a joyful period early in Mahler’s marriage to Alma Schindler, coinciding with the birth of their second child. It is rank superstition (originating in Alma’s unreliable memoirs) that the Finale’s two ‘hammer blows’ symbolise his resignation from the Vienna Court Opera and the death of their elder daughter, both occurring a year after the premiere. His own premature death led some to see the composer as the symphony’s tragic hero, but there is no corroboration for Alma’s account of angst-ridden premonitions as he composed and rehearsed.

The symphony is better understood as a gripping and profound exploration of how tradition can become oppressive, leading to calamity and ending in tragedy. Mahler himself hinted at the idea of composing music about music (‘My Sixth will produce puzzles that can be tackled only by a generation that absorbed my first five’). The work avoids a Brucknerian blend of orchestral timbres, instead being shot through with exacting and distinctive sonorities, compounded by a complex

overlay of voices. Mahler expanded the percussion to include rattle, hammer, tam-tam and birch brush; one critic at the premiere counted 25 cymbal crashes. The composer fortified the standard brass complement with two extra trumpets and a bass trombone but also envisioned that gentle sonorities could overwhelm the listener (the celesta was doubled or tripled and, at one point, the harp ideally quadrupled).

Remarkably, the terrifying and cataclysmic symphony was composed at a lakeside summer villa at Maiernigg in southern Austria. Given Mahler’s interest in numbering his symphonies relative to Beethoven’s, whose legacy so potently affected generations, the influence of the ‘Pastoral’ Symphony (No. 6) is unmistakable. Mahler, however, limited the pastoral mood to one interlude in the first movement and three in the Finale, each time dislodging any comfortable bucolic sentiment. Cowbells (offstage in the outer movements, onstage in the Andante) project an expansive symphonic space in which time is suspended. Fragmentary motifs and harmonic instability hint at a subjectivity that casts doubt upon the symphonic world asserted so vigorously through the rest of the work.

...

From the start, the emotional range is extraordinary. Given the symphony’s length and novelty, it’s striking that the first movement has no slow introduction.

From acerbic march via sombre chorale to sweeping violin melody, the exposition proceeds by stark contrasts, not through transition; the listener becomes inured to these shifts because Mahler calls for the exposition to be repeated (a remnant from the Classical era). Within the central development, the march is dispelled by a pastoral interlude, an eerie calm moment that returns twice in the Finale.

Going against symphonic tradition, Mahler originally placed the Scherzo movement before the slow movement (Andante) but, during his rehearsals for the premiere, reversed the order. Tonight Sakari Oramo has chosen to follow the original ordering, with the Scherzo first. In this movement Mahler observed the tradition of contrasting Scherzo and Trio sections in triple metre but adapted the conventionally light-hearted mood. Brash trills, detached articulation and pitch repetition are the hallmarks: gripping in character, the music pulls the listener in different directions. The Trio, marked 'Altväterisch' (Old-fashioned), begins each time as a whiff from a past era, only to be destabilised through unpredictable accents.

The Andante moderato, in a warm E flat major, tender and restrained (with muted strings), cultivates its own intensity in passionate lyricism or Elysian shimmer. In every way this contrasts with the three A minor movements. In its original, third-movement position (as we hear it tonight) it clears the air for the massive Finale.

It is worth noting, however, that each time Mahler conducted the symphony, the Andante was in the traditional slow-movement position, coming second.

It is rare for a final movement to have a slow introduction. However, the novelty and sheer dimensions of this Finale necessitate more fully preparing the listener, and Mahler's lengthy introduction has its own remarkable structure.

Capacious in scale, this Finale seems even more extensive, in part because the usual sonata form is repeatedly interrupted by elements of rondo form. The materials – lurching dissonance, brash colours and harrowing marches – are presented within discrete sections that are logically organised, only not in a design comforting to listeners. For example, the entire movement forms a massive palindrome (ABCADEDACBA) in which the frenzied 'hammer blow' passages (section D) come near the centre of the movement, and the only recurring section (A) is an eerie gesture suggesting closure. At the culmination of each 'hammer blow' passage, a large hammer slams down ('a strong but dull blow, like the stroke of a hatchet', Mahler requests in the score) above dizzying string figuration as the brass stretch one of the movement's main ideas nearly to breaking point. (Tonight we hear the restored third hammer blow, removed by Mahler after the symphony's first publication, relating – according to Alma's reported 'three blows of fate' – to the diagnosis of Mahler's heart lesion.) Encompassing the full gamut of humanity,

from objectivity and conformism (a crushing march rhythm) to bracing individuality (unmoored dissonance and orchestral disunity), the Finale extends to 30 minutes.

The Sixth is Mahler's only symphony that doesn't end in victory or transfiguration. Instead, the music winds down in a sombre dialogue between tuba and trombones, over a timpani roll. The logic of its inexorable conclusion is just as decisive as its abrupt beginning. Stark junctures throughout the symphony, including the 'fate' motto (a major chord that sinks into the minor) in the outer movements, ensure that listeners are transported along the music's jagged course.

Prescient in its rejection of hidebound aesthetic ideals (*ie* departing from the idea that music should be melodious, balanced and restrained), the Sixth Symphony embraces violence, sonic force and sublime chaos. It was all too much for Mahler's contemporaries. However, after the ravages of the First World War – when tragedy took on a new meaning – and amid the challenges of rebuilding Europe, critics welcomed its determination and power.

Programme note © Karen Painter

Karen Painter is a music professor at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on Germany and Austria during the world wars and Third Reich, and her books include *Symphonic Aspirations: German Music and Politics, 1900–1945* (Harvard UP, 2007) and *Mahler and His World* (Princeton UP, 2002).

GUSTAV MAHLER

The eldest surviving of 14 children, Mahler grew up in the vibrant Bohemian city of Iglau (then within the Austrian Empire and now known as Jihlava), where his father owned a distillery and tavern. Born to Jewish parents who spoke German at home, Mahler was celebrated locally as a piano prodigy, gaining admission to the Vienna Conservatory at the age of 15 but ultimately studying composition. Thereafter he enrolled briefly at the University of Vienna to study philosophy and literature – enduring interests that profoundly affected his compositional development.

A young conductor lurching from one job to the next, Mahler was a force of nature in his capacity to learn operatic repertoire and impose high standards. Even with his enormous conducting skill, his strong personality remained a liability. Following appointments at the Royal Hungarian Opera in Budapest and the Hamburg Municipal Theatre, Mahler converted to Catholicism in 1897, qualifying him for the directorship at the Vienna Court Opera. In a city rife with anti-Semitism, his success at the Court Opera was eclipsed by personal difficulties with singers and the administration. He concurrently directed the Vienna Philharmonic (1898–1901) but orchestra members chafed at his onerous rehearsal demands and revisions to great classics.

Continuing challenges led Mahler to negotiate a contract in 1907 with the

Metropolitan Opera, New York. Sharing the podium with Arturo Toscanini the next season (1908–9) displeased him and he resigned, accepting an invitation to direct the New York Philharmonic. Its expanded concert season (1909–10) and touring proved exhausting, compounded by European travel in the summer. The next winter Mahler's defective heart valves became infected, and he returned to Vienna, where he died at the age of 51.

Mahler's music faced searing criticism because his preferred genre, the symphony, symbolised tradition and morality in Austro-German culture. Favouring a multiplicity of voices that evoked the diverse perspectives of urban and rural life, Mahler rejected the conventions of symphonic unity and of the dominance of melody over accompaniment. With textural expansion and brash colours, he tested the accepted limits of established taste. His first bold innovation was to meld together song (quiet intimacy) and symphony (public grandeur). He incorporated orchestral songs into the first four symphonies (premiered between 1889 and 1901); the Eighth Symphony (composed 1906–7) and *Das Lied von der Erde* ('The Song of the Earth', 1908–9) include vocal text throughout. With the genius and audacity to reinvent and revitalise Austro-German tradition, Mahler left behind a veritable symphonic world (nine numbered symphonies, an incomplete 10th and an early cantata) that drew on orchestral and harmonic colours, spanning the full

expressive range from late Romanticism to modernism.

Profile © Karen Painter

SAKARI ORAMO CONDUCTOR

Sakari Oramo studied conducting with Jorma Panula at the Sibelius Academy (1989–92). He was Music Director of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (1998–2008), Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (2003–12), Principal Conductor of West Coast Kookola Opera (2004–18) and Chief Conductor of the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra (2008–21). He has been Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra since 2013; last week it was announced he will continue in this role until 2030, the orchestra's centenary year.

This summer he conducted four BBC Proms concerts, including the Last Night, with repertoire ranging from Mozart, via Holst and Elgar, to Saariaho and two world premieres. In recent seasons he has conducted the Berlin and Czech Philharmonic orchestras, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony orchestras and the Staatskapelle Dresden.

Sakari Oramo's recordings include Nielsen's First and Third symphonies with the RSO, which won *BBC Music Magazine's* Orchestral Award, Langgaard's Second and Sixth symphonies with the Vienna Philharmonic, which won a *Gramophone* Award, and Busoni's Piano Concerto with Kirill Gerstein and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, which won an International Classical Music Award.



Symphony Orchestra

SATURDAY 12 OCTOBER 7.30PM

Bartók's Third Piano Concerto

UNSUK CHIN Alaraph: Ritual of the Heartbeat

BÉLA BARTÓK Piano Concerto No. 3

CLAUDE DEBUSSY La mer

MAURICE RAVEL Boléro

Bertrand Chamayou piano
Dinis Sousa conductor

Claude Debussy gazed at the waves of the English channel, and imagined a thousand glowing colours. Isolated and ill, the exiled Béla Bartók wrote a piano concerto for his beloved wife, and created rhythms that dance for joy. And in our own time, UnsuK Chin gazes into the infinite and finds a star that pulses in time with the human heart.

Chin's wondrous new orchestral work takes its cue both from Korean court music and the curiously human rhythm of the star Alaraph. It's an unforgettable opening to conductor Dinis Sousa's nature-inspired debut concert with the BBC Symphony Orchestra: and with the 'remarkable' (*The Guardian*) French pianist Bertrand Chamayou also appearing for the first time with the BBC SO, there'll be a regular constellation of stars in alignment tonight. The concert comes to a close with the insistent rhythms and drama of Ravel's Boléro.

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BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

For over 90 years the BBC Symphony Orchestra has been a driving force in the British musical landscape, championing contemporary music and giving voice to rarely performed and neglected composers. It plays a key role in the BBC Proms, performing regularly throughout each season, including the First and Last Nights.

The BBC SO is Associate Orchestra at the Barbican, where it presents a distinctive season of concerts. Chief Conductor Sakari Oramo has a long-standing and widely acclaimed relationship with the orchestra. His concerts this season include four Mahler symphonies, Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 3 with Sir Stephen Hough, Doreen Carwithen's Concerto for Piano and Strings with Alexandra Dariescu, the UK premiere of Kaija Saariaho's trumpet concerto *HUSH* and Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the BBC Symphony Chorus, dedicated to the memory of the late Sir Andrew Davis. The BBC Symphony Chorus also joins the BBC SO for Haydn's 'Nelson' Mass with soloists Masabane Cecilia Rangwanasha, Jennifer Johnston and Derek Welton and Bartók's *Cantata profana*, conducted by Principal Guest Conductor Dalia Stasevska. Carolyn

Kuan conducts the UK premiere of Huang Ro's opera *M. Butterfly* and Total Immersion days are dedicated to Pierre Boulez and to electronic music. *Wild Isles* features highlights on the big screen from the BBC nature documentary series.

The BBC SO makes appearances across the UK and internationally, and gives free concerts at its Maida Vale studios. You can hear the vast majority of the BBC SO's performances on BBC Radio 3 and BBC Sounds, with all 2024 BBC Proms currently available on BBC Sounds and Proms including the First and Last Night available to watch on BBC iPlayer.

The BBC Symphony Orchestra and Chorus – alongside the BBC Concert Orchestra, BBC Singers and BBC Proms – offer innovative education and community activities. Together they play a lead role in the BBC Ten Pieces and BBC Young Composer programmes, including work with schools, young people and families in East London ahead of the BBC SO's move to its new home in the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, Stratford.

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Franziska Deschner

Second Violins

Heather Hohmann

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Rose Hinton

Vanessa Hughes

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Cellos

Jonathan Aasgaard

Tamsy Kaner

Graham Bradshaw

Mark Sheridan

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Morwenna Del Mar

Clare Hinton

Angus McCall

Deni Teo

Ben Michaels

Double Basses

Nicholas Bayley

Richard Alsop

Anita Langridge

Michael Clarke

Beverley Jones

Elen Pan

Simon Oliver

Lewis Reid

Cathy Colwell

Peter Smith

Flutes

Daniel Pailthorpe

Tomoka Mukai

Fergus Davidson

Emma Williams

Piccolo

Kathleen Stevenson

Oboes

Tom Blomfield

Imogen Smith

Ruth Contractor

Lauren Weavers

Cor Anglais

Sarah Harper

Clarinets

Jonathan Parkin

Harry Cameron-Penny

William White

E flat Clarinet

Richard Russell

Bass Clarinet

Thomas Lessels

Bassoons

Tammy Thorn

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Matthew Kitteringham

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Contrabassoon

Steven Magee

Horns

Nicholas Korth

Michael Murray

James Pillai

Nicholas Hougham

Mark Wood

Paul Cott

Alexei Watkins

Finlay Bain

Phillippa Koushk-Jalili

Trumpets

Philip Cobb

Joseph Atkins

David Geohagen

Martin Hurrell

Niall Keatley

Stuart Essenhigh

Trombones

Helen Vollam

Dan Jenkins

Bass Trombones

Robert O'Neill

Joseph Arnold

Tuba

Sam Elliott

Timpani

Antoine Bedewi

Matthew Farthing

Percussion

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Harps

Elizabeth Bass

Daniel De Fry

Celesta

Philip Moore

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