



MAHLER'S FIFTH



CLASSICAL SERIES

THURSDAY, MARCH 8, AT 7 PM | FRIDAY & SATURDAY, MARCH 9 & 10, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, *conductor*

JENNIFER KOH, *violin*

ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

Violin Concerto

Mirage

Pulse 1

Pulse 2

Adieu

Jennifer Koh, violin

- INTERMISSION -

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor

Part I

Trauermarsch

Stürmisch bewegt. Mit grösster Vehemenz

Part II

Scherzo: Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

Part III

Adagietto: Sehr langsam

Rondo - Finale: Allegro

This concert will last approximately two hours and 10 minutes, including intermission.

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*Jennifer Koh's appearance
is made possible in part by
Allis Dale and John Gillmor.*

TONIGHT'S CONCERT

AT A GLANCE



ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

Violin Concerto

- Like Gustav Mahler during his own lifetime, Salonen has established a high profile as a conductor — most notably serving as music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic — but he is also a distinctive and original composer as well.
- Currently serving a three-year term as a composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic, Salonen is part of a pioneering generation of contemporary composers in his native Finland, where he studied at the Sibelius Academy. The Violin Concerto is one of his most frequently performed works, receiving the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in Music in 2012.
- The composer originally wrote the piece for violinist Leila Josefowicz, who played a collaborative role in its creation. “As a result of that process,” he writes, “this Concerto is as much a portrait of her as it is my more private narrative, a kind of summary of my experiences as a musician and a human being at the watershed age of 50.”
- Written in four movements, each of which captures a distinct mood or feeling, the work closes on a chord unlike any other in the piece, while the violin holds out a soaring high note. “When I had written the very last chord of the piece,” Salonen writes, “I felt confused: why does the last chord — and only that — sound completely different from all other harmony of the piece? As if it belonged to a different composition. Now I believe I have the answer. That chord is a beginning of something new.”



GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 5

- Mahler wrote his Fifth Symphony shortly after experiencing a life-threatening hemorrhage and also while he was in the midst of his courtship with Alma Schindler, whom he married in the spring of 1902. He completed the work that summer — the time of year when he was able to be most prolific, as he was on a break from conducting.
- While Mahler’s previous symphonies incorporated voices or text addressing programmatic elements, his Fifth Symphony is purely instrumental and shows the development of his writing for orchestra. The work is structured in an arch-like design, with two longer parts flanking a shorter middle part, and Mahler connects movements within the piece through common musical ideas.
- His choice of keys, beginning in C-sharp minor and ultimately concluding in D major, is both symbolic of a dark-to-light progression and also shows his disregard for tradition. Standard practice before Mahler was to have a work begin and end in the same key, or at least the relative major or minor key. His choice to break this precedent solidifies his role as a link between the Romantic and Modern eras.
- Conductor Willem Mengelberg, who was a close friend of Mahler’s, claimed that the Adagietto movement was a musical love letter to the composer’s fiancée, Alma. Because of its somber, gentle mood, however, this music has been used as a musical memorial in times of collective grieving, most notably at Robert Kennedy’s 1968 funeral, with Leonard Bernstein leading the New York Philharmonic

— Corinne Fombelle & Thomas May



ESA-PEKKA SALONEN

Born on June 30, 1958, in Helsinki, Finland; currently resides in Los Angeles.

Composed: 2008-09

First performance: April 9, 2009, with Leila Josefowicz as the soloist and the composer conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the Nashville Symphony's first performances.

Estimated length: 30 minutes

Violin Concerto

It was during his final season of a now legendary tenure helping the Los Angeles Philharmonic that Esa-Pekka Salonen unveiled his Violin Concerto to the world, having spent, as he put it, “nine months, the length of human gestation,” on creating it. By this point, Salonen had come to realize that stepping away from his high-profile position in Los Angeles was the only way he could seriously follow through with his desire to focus more on composing.

The Violin Concerto, in particular, which shared the bill with Beethoven's Fifth Symphony at that world premiere, has gone on to become one of the Finnish composer-conductor's most frequently performed and acclaimed works. In 2012 it received the prestigious Grawemeyer Award in Music.

This season Salonen is completing a three-year term as composer-in-residence with the New York Philharmonic. But he continues to lead a highly active career as a conductor, taking the podium again last month to lead the L.A. Phil (where he is conductor laureate) in performances of his three major instrumental concertos (which include concertos for piano and cello as well). He also serves as principal conductor and artistic advisor of London's Philharmonia and is planning to conduct his first complete *Ring* cycle in future seasons at Finnish National Opera and Ballet. Familiar to a wider public from his appearance in

an iPad commercial (shown composing the Violin Concerto), Salonen also remains involved in the cutting edge of the intersections between music and technology. The Violin Concerto is one of the works featured in Apple's Orchestra App.

Salonen is part of a pioneering generation of Finnish composers who studied together at the Sibelius Academy in his native Helsinki. While still a student, he joined with Magnus Lindberg and *Kaija Saariaho* to direct an avant-garde group they called Korvat Auki! (“Ears Open!”). Those years of adventurous discovery may have been typical of a youthful disposition, but Salonen has stayed true to the faith he and his fellow musicians proclaimed: that music should be an ear-opening experience that can transform our perceptions of the world.

However, Salonen didn't foresee the enormously successful career he would launch by accident in 1983, when he filled in at the last minute for Michael Tilson Thomas to conduct the Philharmonia Orchestra in Mahler's Third Symphony. That feat eventually opened the door to his 17-year-long, highly influential era with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, with which he made his U.S. conducting debut in 1984 at age 26. Like Leonard Bernstein, Salonen has had to contend with the challenges of trying to balance the demands of developing his gifts as an extraordinary conductor and composer alike.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

When the Violin Concerto received the Grawemeyer, award director Marc Satterwhite offered an apt summation of the four-movement work, noting that it “begins with a solitary violin, moves on to embrace a series of themes ranging from a quiet heartbeat to urban pop music, and ends on a chord unlike any other in the work.” Salonen himself emphasizes that,

in originally writing the piece for the American violinist Leila Josefowicz, he determined “to cover as wide a range of expression as I could imagine...from the virtuosic and flashy to the aggressive and brutal, from the meditative and static to the nostalgic and autumnal.” He adds that the resulting concerto “is as much a portrait of [Josefowicz] as it is my more private narrative, a

kind of summary of my experiences as a musician and a human being at the watershed age of 50.”

The composer has provided the following description of the music:

“Movement I (Mirage): The violin starts alone, as if the music had been going on for some time already. Very light bell-like sounds comment on the virtuosic line here and there. Suddenly we zoom in to maximum magnification: the open strings of the violin continue their resonance, but amplified; the light playfulness has been replaced by an extreme close-up of the strings, now played by the cellos and basses; the sound is dark and resonant. Zoom out again, and back in after a while. The third close-up leads into a recitative. Solo violin is playing an embellished melodic line that leads into some impossibly fast music. I zoom out once again at the very end, this time straight up in the air. The violin follows. Finally all movement stops on the note D, which leads to...

“Movement II (Pulse I): All is quiet, static. I imagined a room, silent: all you can hear is the heartbeat of the person next to you in bed, sound asleep. You cannot sleep, but there is no angst, just some gentle, diffuse thoughts on your mind. Finally the first rays of the sun can be seen through the curtains, here represented by the flutes.

“Movement III (Pulse II): The pulse is no

longer a heartbeat. This music is bizarre and urban, heavily leaning towards popular culture with traces of (synthetic) folk music. The violin is pushed to its very limits physically. Something very Californian in all this. Hooray for freedom of expression. And thank you, guys!

“Movement IV (Adieu): This is not a specific farewell to anything in particular. It is more related to the very basic process of nature, of something coming to an end and something new being born out of the old. Of course this music has a strong element of nostalgia, and some of the short outbursts of the full orchestra are almost violent, but I tried to illuminate the harmony from within. Not with big gestures, but with light.

“When I had written the very last chord of the piece I felt confused: why does the last chord — and only that — sound completely different from all other harmony of the piece? As if it belonged to a different composition. Now I believe I have the answer. That chord is a beginning of something new.”

In addition to solo violin, the Violin Concerto is scored for 3 flutes (2nd doubling alto, 3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, contrabass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, celesta and strings.



GUSTAV MAHLER

Born on July 7, 1860, in Kalischt, Bohemia; died on May 18, 1911, in Vienna.

Composed: 1901-02

First performance: October 18, 1904, in with the composer conducting the Gürzenich Orchestra

First Nashville Symphony performance:

December 14 & 15, 1970, with Music Director Thor Johnson

Estimated length: 72 minutes

Symphony No. 5 in C-Sharp Minor

The Fifth Symphony represents a major turning point in Gustav Mahler’s career and life.

Early in 1901, several months before he began composing the work, he had suffered a nearly fatal hemorrhage. The experience left its stamp on his music — and so did the rejuvenating sense of a new lease on life that came when Mahler met Alma Schindler, a ravishing and brilliant young Viennese beauty from a prominent artistic family. Nearly twice Alma’s age, the composer married

her in March 1902. Mahler completed his draft of the Fifth that summer and then invited his new bride to hear him play through the just-finished composition at the piano.

While Mahler’s previous symphonies incorporated various overtly programmatic elements (relating to nothing less than the evolution of the cosmos and the possibility of resurrection, for example), in the Fifth he develops a more self-contained and densely woven language

for orchestra alone — no voices, no texts to be set. That's not to say that the Fifth lacks references to Mahler's songs: buried in the score are allusions to the enchanted world of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (the folk-song collection that provided source material for previous symphonies), and also to the Romantic poet Friedrich Rückert, whose poetry Mahler began to set while composing the Fifth. He even gives the first movement a title ("Funeral March") — an explicitly programmatic reference whose counterpart is the implicit "love song" to Alma represented by the Adagietto.

But the Fifth displays a new concentration on internal coherence. We see it in the architecture

and symmetrical design of the entire work, which is cast in five movements that are grouped into three major parts. Part I comprises the first two movements, which share musical ideas. Part II contains the Scherzo alone, the longest single movement, yet the shortest of the three parts. Symmetrical to Part I in total length, Part III consists of the Adagietto and Finale, which are likewise musically interlinked. The result is an arch-like design that has been likened to an hourglass, while cross-references among the different movements strengthen the overall coherence of the Fifth.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A prelude solo trumpet opens the Funeral March. A threnody begins to unfurl but is interrupted by impassioned music as the trumpet's call, no longer solemn, suggests shrieks of grief-stricken torment. The original call and its ensuing threnody return, leading eventually to an overwhelming climax and a final breakdown into inconsolable sorrow.

All of this functions as a large-scale introduction to the "real" first movement (Stürmisch bewegt, mit grösster Vehemenz — "tempestuously agitated, with the greatest vehemence"), which begins with a riot of turbulent gestures. The music develops restlessly as it attains violent extremes of despair, with flashbacks to the Funeral March. A consoling brass chorale, later expanded into a triumphant statement from the full orchestra, brings a sudden sense of optimism into this world. Yet it is transient, and the return of darker strains only intensifies the bleakness of Part I. Mahler allows the music to fragment and break apart, much as the Funeral March crumbles into ruins in the final measures.

Mahler assigns great importance to the Scherzo by expanding its dimensions and placing it at the midpoint of the Fifth. Its cheerful acceptance of life is illustrated by a swerve to the major. This foreshadows the key and spirit of the finale and is thus more than mere "relief" between weightier matters. In contrast to the stark, ritualistic tread of the Funeral March, the Scherzo pulses with vibrant dance. At the outset four horns peel out a three-note motif that serves as a signpost amid the Scherzo's continually evolving swirl and kaleidoscopic detail. Blending the humbler associations of the country dance known as the

Ländler with other perspectives, Mahler enhances the range of associations in this Scherzo. The first of its two trios takes shape as a sophisticated Viennese waltz (also in triple meter, like the *Ländler*), while the second presents a solo horn as the protagonist, evoking a pristine Alpine vastness.

Another signature of the newer style Mahler was evolving in the Fifth Symphony is a genuine mastery of polyphony — the art of weaving together a multitude of individual voices and textures, rather than merely juxtaposing them. It's no coincidence that he was at the time exploring a deeper admiration for J.S. Bach. Mahler's own approach to polyphony here can be especially savored in the Scherzo's coda section, which anticipates elements of the Finale.

Because of its use as a musical memorial in times of collective grieving, the F major Adagietto has acquired a reputation as world-weary, death-obsessed music — a return to the funereal tone that opened the Symphony. Yet according to the conductor Willem Mengelberg, a champion and close friend of Mahler's, the composer's inspiration here was none other than his fiancée, Alma Schindler. The Adagietto, Mengelberg claimed, encoded a musical love letter to his beloved during their courtship.

The choice of tempo here is crucial: an "Adagietto" is by definition not as slow as Adagio, yet Mahler's marking in the score is *sehr langsam* ("very slow"). The resulting choice can make the music sound like a gentle resignation or, alternatively, like a transcendent serenade. The Adagietto introduces a note of timelessness, in powerful contrast to the grim anxiety of Part I and the frenetic motions at the end of the Scherzo. In

terms of orchestration, too, Mahler points up the contrast, reducing his forces to a chamber-like ensemble of strings accompanied, with almost Impressionistic delicacy, by harp.

All of this sets us up for the outburst of animated good humor in the Finale, for which the Adagietto serves as a lyrical prelude — with a solo horn bridging the two movements (a reference to the all-important role of the horns in the Scherzo). Though Mahler labels the fifth movement a “Rondo-Finale,” he upsets any expectations of a modest, lighthearted finish, much as he had rejected stereotypes of the Scherzo as a less substantial “breather.”

Rambunctiously fertile, breaking up and recombining ideas with a bold sense of invention, the music of the Finale summons the spirit of Bach with even greater force. Even the ethereal Adagietto gets woven in via speeded-up fragments of its melody. Near the end of the Fifth, Mahler vindicates the hopeful but transient chorale we

had heard in the second movement — this time in a sunburst of irrepressible affirmation. But as soon as the stage has been set for a dignified, triumphal conclusion, Mahler plays the trickster and adds an irreverently anarchic passage at the very end, crowning the Fifth with a fresh dose of *joie de vivre*.

The Fifth Symphony is scored for 4 flutes (2 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (2nd doubling E-flat clarinet and 3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, snare drum, cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, whip, glockenspiel, harp and strings

— Thomas May, the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator, is a writer and translator who covers classical and contemporary music. He blogs at memeteria.com.

ABOUT THE ARTIST



JENNIFER KOH
VIOLIN

Violinist Jennifer Koh is recognized for her intense, commanding performances, delivered with dazzling virtuosity and technical assurance. She is well-known for

curating projects that involve commissions from today’s foremost composers, and among her many activities during the 2017/18 season, she premieres new works written for *New American Concerto*, her multi-season commissioning project exploring the violin concerto and its potential for artistic engagement with contemporary societal concerns and issues. *New American Concerto* launched in the summer of 2017 with Vijay Iyer’s *Trouble*, and this season Koh will premiere a new concerto by Christopher Cerrone, commissioned by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Koh also continues critically acclaimed series from past seasons, including *Shared Madness*, comprising short works for solo violin that explore virtuosity in the 21st century, written by more than 30 of today’s most celebrated composers; and

Bach and Beyond, a recital series that traces the history of the solo violin repertoire from Bach’s Six Sonatas and Partitas to 20th- and 21st-century composers. She also performs a broad range of concertos that reflects the breadth of her musical interests, including Barber’s Violin Concerto with the Marin Symphony Orchestra and Oklahoma City Philharmonic; Bernstein’s Serenade with the Fresno Philharmonic; Unsuk Chin’s Violin Concerto with the Melbourne Symphony; and Anna Clyne’s *Rest These Hands* with the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne.

Koh is the artistic director of *arco collaborative*, an artist-driven nonprofit that fosters a better understanding of our world through musical dialogue. A committed educator, she has won high praise for her performances in classrooms around the country under her Music Messenger outreach program. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the National Foundation for the Advancement for the Arts, a scholarship program for high school students in the arts.

Born in Chicago of Korean parents, Koh made her debut with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at age 11. She is *Musical America’s* 2016 Instrumentalist of the Year, a winner of the Concert Artists Guild Competition, and a recipient of an Avery Fisher Career Grant.