

2025–2026 | 126th Season
Marian Anderson Hall

The Philadelphia Orchestra

Friday, January 9, at 2:00
Saturday, January 10, at 8:00
Sunday, January 11, at 2:00

Dalia Stasevska Conductor

Augustin Hadelich Violin

Joëlle Harvey Soprano

Adams *Short Ride in a Fast Machine*

Barber Violin Concerto, Op. 14 /○

I. Allegro

II. Andante

III. Presto in moto perpetuo

Intermission

Mahler Symphony No. 4 in G major

I. Bedächtig. Nicht eilen

II. In gemächerlicher Bewegung

III. Ruhewoll. Poco adagio

IV. Sehr behaglich

This program runs approximately 2 hours.

/○ designates a work that was given its world or United States premiere by The Philadelphia Orchestra, part of the Orchestra's 125th anniversary celebration.

These concerts are part of the Peter A. Benoliel Violin Concerts, established in his honor by **Dr. Richard M. Klein**.

Philadelphia Orchestra concerts are broadcast on WRTI 90.1 FM on Sunday afternoons at 1 PM and are repeated on Monday evenings at 7 PM on WRTI HD 2. Visit www.wrti.org to listen live or for more details.



The Philadelphia Orchestra

The world-renowned Philadelphia Orchestra strives to share the transformative power of music with the widest possible audience, and to create joy, connection, and excitement through music in the Philadelphia region, across the country, and around the world. Through innovative programming, robust education initiatives, a commitment to its diverse communities, and the embrace of digital outreach, the ensemble is creating an expansive and inclusive future for classical music. In June 2021 the Orchestra and its home, the Kimmel Center, united. Today, The Philadelphia Orchestra and Ensemble Arts brings the greatest performances and most impactful education and community programs to audiences in Philadelphia and beyond.

Yannick Nézet-Séguin is now in his 14th season with The Philadelphia Orchestra, serving as music and artistic director. His connection to the ensemble's musicians has been praised by both concertgoers and critics, and he is esteemed by the musicians of the Orchestra, audiences, and the community. In addition to expanding the repertoire by embracing an ever-growing and diverse group of today's composers, Yannick and the Orchestra are committed to performing and recording the works of previously overlooked composers.

Your Philadelphia Orchestra takes great pride in its hometown, performing for the people of Philadelphia year-round, at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, throughout the community, over the airwaves, and online. The Kimmel Center has been the ensemble's home since 2001, and in 2024 Verizon Hall at the Kimmel Center was officially rededicated as Marian Anderson Hall in honor of the legendary

contralto, civil rights icon, and Philadelphian. The Orchestra's award-winning education and community programs connect, uplift, and celebrate nearly 40,000 Philadelphians and 250 schools from diverse communities annually, through inclusive arts education and vibrant engagement that reflect our city's voices and expand access to creative opportunities. Students, families, and other community members can enjoy free and discounted experiences with The Philadelphia Orchestra through programs such as the Jane H. Kesson School Concerts, Family Concerts, Open Rehearsals, PlayINs, and Our City, Your Orchestra community concerts.

Through concerts, tours, residencies, and recordings, the Orchestra is a global ambassador and one of our nation's greatest exports. It performs annually at Carnegie Hall, the Mann Center, the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, and the Bravo! Vail Music Festival. The Orchestra also has a rich touring history, having first performed outside Philadelphia in its earliest days. In 1973 it became the first American orchestra to perform in the People's Republic of China, launching a now-five-decade commitment of people-to-people exchange through music.

Under Yannick's leadership, the Orchestra returned to recording with 15 celebrated releases on the Deutsche Grammophon label, including the GRAMMY® Award-winning *Florence Price Symphonies Nos. 1 & 3*. The Orchestra also reaches thousands of radio listeners with weekly broadcasts on WRTI-FM and SiriusXM. For more information, please visit www.philorch.org.

Conductor

Matthew Johnson



Dalia Stasevska is one of the most stratospherically ascendant musicians in classical music today. Principal guest conductor of the BBC Symphony, she has established herself as a commanding musical voice, a boundary-pushing innovator, and a fearless activist and advocate for change. She made her Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 2023. In addition to these current performances, highlights of her 2025–26 season include concerts with the New York, Rotterdam, and Munich philharmonics; the Cleveland Orchestra; the Toronto and Pittsburgh symphonies;

the Mozarteum Orchestra Salzburg; and the Vienna Symphony at the Bregenz Festival. Further highlights include two periods with the Deutsches-Sinfonieorchester Berlin and appearances with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony, the Orchestre National de France, and the Czech, Helsinki, Oslo, and Netherlands Radio philharmonics. Recent orchestral engagements have included performances with the Boston Symphony at the Tanglewood Music Festival; the Los Angeles, Dresden, and Royal Stockholm philharmonics; the San Francisco, Montreal, and Finnish Radio symphonies; and the Orchestre de Paris. She has also made notable debuts with the Berlin Philharmonic; the Orchestra, Choir, and Children's Voices of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia; and the New World Symphony, among others. In the summer of 2025, she conducted twice at the BBC Proms, leading both the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and the BBC Symphony.

A passionate opera conductor, Ms. Stasevska debuts this season at Los Angeles Opera with Philip Glass's *Akhnaten* and at the Deutsche Oper Berlin with Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In 2023 she made her highly successful debut at the Glyndebourne Opera Festival with a revival of the iconic Peter Hall production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In previous seasons she returned to Finnish National Opera and Ballet to conduct a double bill of Poulenc's *La Voix humaine* and Weill Songs with Karita Mattila, and to Norske Opera for Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*. Acclaimed recordings include her solo debut album with the BBC Symphony entitled *Dalia's Mixtape* on Platoon, which features the work of 10 contemporary composers, including Judith Weir, Anna Meredith, and Caroline Shaw. Nominated for a *Gramophone* Award in the Contemporary category, the album was released track by track over the course of several months, breaking with traditional album release strategy and offering a new approach for the digital age.

Ms. Stasevska was named the “European of the Year” in 2025 by the board of European Movement Finland along with her brothers, documentary filmmaker-cellist Lukas Stasevskij and journalist-pianist Justas Stasevskij. She was bestowed the Order of Princess Olga of the III degree by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in October 2021 for her significant personal contribution to strengthening the prestige of Ukraine’s historical and cultural heritage. Since February 2022, she has been outspoken in her support of Ukraine, speaking about it publicly while also personally delivering aid to the front lines and conducting concerts in that country.

Soloist

Sinclair Yang



Augustin Hadelich is one of the great violinists of our time. Known for his phenomenal technique, insightful and persuasive interpretations, and ravishing tone, he appears extensively on the world's foremost concert stages. He has performed with all the major American orchestras as well as the Berlin, Vienna, and London philharmonics; the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra; the Bavarian Radio Symphony; and many other eminent ensembles. He made his Philadelphia Orchestra debut in 2013.

This past summer, Mr. Hadelich appeared with the Boston Symphony at the Tanglewood Music Festival, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra at the Enescu Festival in Bucharest, and the Orchestre de Paris at the Lucerne Festival, as well as at the BBC Proms in London, the Aspen Music Festival in Colorado, and the Grant Park Music Festival in Chicago. In the 2025–26 season he is artist in residence with the Boston Symphony where he is featured in concerto, chamber music, and solo violin recital formats. In addition to these current performances, season highlights include appearances with the Chicago, Pittsburgh, Houston, St. Louis, San Diego, and New World symphonies; the Cleveland and National Arts Centre orchestras; and the New York Philharmonic. In Europe he performs with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden, the Deutsches Sinfonie-Orchester Berlin, the Munich Philharmonic, and the Vienna Symphony, among others. In April he will be in residence at the Tongyeong International Music Festival in South Korea.

In 2016 Mr. Hadelich, a Warner Classics Artist, received a GRAMMY Award for his recording of Henri Dutilleux's violin concerto, *L'Arbre des songes*, with the Seattle Symphony and Ludovic Morlot. His most recent album, *American Road Trip*, is a journey through the landscape of American music with pianist Orion Weiss. It was released in August 2024 and was awarded an Opus Klassik in 2025 for Chamber Music Recording of the Year. A dual American German citizen born in Italy to German parents, Mr. Hadelich rose to fame when he won the Gold Medal at the 2006 International Violin Competition of Indianapolis. Further distinctions followed, including an Avery Fisher Career Grant in 2009. In 2018 he was named *Musical America's* "Instrumentalist of the Year." He plays a 1744 violin by Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, known as "Leduc, ex Szeryng," on loan from the Tarisio Trust.

Peter A. Benoliel Violin Concerts

A passionate violinist from early childhood, Peter A. Benoliel joined the Philadelphia Orchestra Board of Directors in 1980 and served as chair from 1995 to 2000. His huge contributions to the Orchestra as a leader and philanthropist are paralleled only by his deep love for the violinists who help bring the famous Philadelphia Sound to the world.

Soloist



Archie Domeson

A native of Bolivar, New York, American soprano **Joélle Harvey** has built a reputation as one of the finest singers of her generation, performing major roles on the world's opera and concert stages. She makes her Philadelphia Orchestra debut with these performances. Other highlights of the 2025–26 season include debuts at the Bavarian State Opera and Washington National Opera as Susanna in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*; Pamina in Santa Fe Opera's new Christopher Luscombe production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, conducted by Harry Bicket; and a return to the role of Pamina with the Metropolitan Opera in its holiday presentation. She also performs Beethoven's Ninth Symphony with the Cleveland Orchestra and Franz Welser-Möst, Bach's *Easter Oratorio* and Magnificat with the San Francisco Symphony and Bernard Labadie, and Bach Cantatas with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center.

Ms. Harvey began a varied 2024–25 season with Jane Glover and Music of the Baroque in Haydn's *The Creation* and returned to Chicago later in the season for Haydn's *Mass in Time of War* with the Chicago Symphony and Manfred Honeck. She sang Mozart's Requiem with the St. Louis Symphony and Stéphane Denève, a program of Poulenc and Ravel in a return to the Milwaukee Symphony; and Mahler's Second Symphony for music director Robin Ticciati's final season with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. She performed Handel's *Messiah* with the Houston Symphony and Jonathan Cohen; selections from Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Cincinnati Symphony; Bach's *Easter Oratorio* and Magnificat with the Cleveland Orchestra and *St. John Passion* with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, both with Bernard Labadie; and Handel cantatas with Boston's Handel and Haydn Society and Mr. Cohen. During the summer of 2025, she returned to the role of Anne Trulove in Chas Rader-Shieber's new production of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at Des Moines Metro Opera.

An in-demand vocal soloist, Ms. Harvey regularly appears with the great American orchestras, including the New York and Los Angeles philharmonics, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Chicago and San Francisco symphonies. On the operatic stage, she performs frequently at the Glyndebourne Festival, having appeared in eight roles, including the title role in Handel's *Semele* and Cleopatra in Handel's *Julius Caesar*, Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro*, and Adina in Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*. She made her Metropolitan Opera debut as Pamina in *The Magic Flute*, her Zurich Opera debut as Aristea in Pergolesi's *L'Olimpiade*, and her Royal Opera, Covent Garden, debut as Susanna. Other appearances include Galatea in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* and Zerlina in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence; Flora in Britten's *The Turn of the Screw* with Houston Grand Opera; Anne Trulove in *The Rake's Progress* with Utah Opera; and Zerlina and Eurydice in Telemann's *Orpheus* with New York City Opera. She received her bachelor's and master's degrees in vocal performance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. She began her career training at Glimmerglass Opera (now the Glimmerglass Festival) and the Merola Opera Program.

Framing the Program

Parallel Events

1899

Mahler

Symphony No. 4

Music

Sibelius

Finlandia

Literature

Wilde

*The Importance of
Being Earnest*

Art

Cézanne

*Turning Road at
Montgeroult*

History

Boer War

1939

Barber

Violin

Concerto

Music

Copland

Billy the Kid

Literature

Joyce

Finnegans Wake

Art

Picasso

*Night Fishing at
Antibes*

History

Germany invades
Poland

John Adams is one of the most celebrated and often performed American composers of our time. His brief, brilliant, bustling *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* displays characteristic clues to his popularity and proves a perfect concert opener.

Philadelphia claims Samuel Barber as one of its own. Born in the suburbs and trained at the Curtis Institute of Music, he went on to become one of the great composers of the 20th century, an imaginative traditionalist who kept elements of musical Romanticism alive. His beloved Violin Concerto has long been a staple of The Philadelphia Orchestra, which premiered the work in 1941. It shows the young composer at the height of his lyric powers in the opening two movements and offers an exciting perpetual motion finale.

Gustav Mahler's Fourth Symphony is his shortest, and in many respects the most Classical and intimate of his works in the genre. It evocatively opens with the sounds of sleigh bells and progresses through the four movements to a vocal finale that offers a child's vision of paradise with an ethereal setting of the poem "The Heavenly Life" sung by a soprano soloist.

1986

Adams

*Short Ride in a
Fast Machine*

Music

Babbitt

Transfigured Notes

Literature

Atwood

*The Handmaid's
Tale*

Art

Koons

Rabbit

History

Nuclear accident
at Chernobyl

The Philadelphia Orchestra is the only orchestra in the world with three weekly broadcasts on SiriusXM's *Symphony Hall*, Channel 76, on Mondays at 7 PM, Thursdays at 12 AM, and Saturdays at 4 PM.

The Music

Short Ride in a Fast Machine

John Adams

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts, February 15, 1947

Now living in Berkeley, California



“Whenever serious art loses track of its roots in the vernacular,” writes John Adams, “then it begins to atrophy.” Adams is not the first “serious” composer to feel this way. Haydn and Beethoven each composed hundreds of settings of British, Irish, and Scottish folk tunes, and considered this activity an essential part of their musical personalities. Mozart devoted many hours to writing popular canons for mass appeal. Mahler, the brewer’s son, made frequent use—in the most serious symphonic contexts—of the beer-barrel music

he grew up with. Lutoslawski worked as a tavern pianist; even the staid Schoenberg was no stranger to the cabaret.

Rigorous Training and Various Influences But like those composers, Adams has approached the vernacular in music from a background of rigorous training. His involvement with popular styles has, in turn, had a potent impact on his serious music. Born in Massachusetts, he was educated at Harvard in the mid-1960s, and counts as mentors Leon Kirchner, David Del Tredici, and Roger Sessions. His inspirations have included Schoenberg’s 12-tone methods, electronic and avant-garde styles, John Cage, and the music of tough New England composers like Ives and Ruggles. Eventually he began to feel the impact of what came to be called Minimalism, and especially the music of Steve Reich, whose consonant harmonies and gradually shifting ostinatos (short, repeated motifs and melodic fragments) are much felt in Adams’s work.

Yet he worked out a strikingly individual synthesis of all these strands, and today Adams is the most frequently performed living American composer of concert music. His music has had enormous impact the world over, partly because of the way it took the creative spark of the Minimalists and imbued it with greater variety of gesture, texture, and familiar idioms. His works have been performed by all the major orchestras in the United States and by ensembles worldwide, and they have been choreographed by such companies as the Dance Theater of Harlem and New York City Ballet.

Among his major early works are *Grand Pianola Music* for piano and orchestra, *Harmonielehre* for orchestra, the string septet *Shaker Loops*, and *Harmonium* for chorus and orchestra—and, more recently, several concerto; *El Niño* for vocalists, choruses, and orchestra; and *On the Transmigration of Souls*, his commemoration for the victims of the 9/11 attacks, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 2003.. His 1987 opera *Nixon in China* brought

world politics onto the musical stage with transcendent aplomb, and the subsequent *The Death of Klinghoffer* and *Doctor Atomic* confirmed Adams's place as one of the most original voices of the century.

A Closer Look In the concert hall Adams first became known for his *Chairman Dances*—which includes material later formed into music for *Nixon in China*—and for his two orchestral fanfares, *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* and *Tromba lontana*, both composed in 1986. *Short Ride in a Fast Machine* was written on commission from the Pittsburgh Symphony to commemorate the opening of Great Woods, in Mansfield, Massachusetts. It was first performed on June 13, 1986, by the Pittsburgh Symphony under the baton of Michael Tilson Thomas. It is an exhilarating four-and-a-half-minute fanfare in which orchestral colors shimmer and intermingle in a fabric of austere motivic material and potent musical ideas.

—Paul J. Horsley

Paul J. Horsley is performing arts editor for The Independent in Kansas City. Previously he was program annotator and musicologist for The Philadelphia Orchestra and music and dance critic for The Kansas City Star.

Short Ride in a Fast Machine was composed in 1986.

The first Philadelphia Orchestra performance of the piece took place at the Mann Center in June 1989; James DePreist conducted. The first subscription performances were in December 1990 with Marin Alsop on the podium. Most recently on subscription, the composer himself led the work, in March 1999.

The score calls for two piccolos, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, four clarinets, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drum with pedal, crotales, glockenspiel, large bass drum, large tam-tam, medium tam-tam, sizzle cymbal, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tambourine, triangle, wood blocks, xylophone), two synthesizers (optional), and strings.

Performance time is approximately five minutes.

The Music

Violin Concerto

Samuel Barber

Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, March 9, 1910

Died in New York City, January 23, 1981



The 1930s proved to be a golden decade for the composition of violin concertos, beginning with Stravinsky, continuing with Szymanowski, Prokofiev, Berg, Schoenberg, and Bartók, and concluding with Samuel Barber. While all the other composers were distinguished figures by this time (Berg's Concerto is his last completed work), Barber was in his late 20s and just building his reputation. He had written his *School for Scandal* Overture (which The Philadelphia Orchestra premiered in 1933) before graduating from the Curtis Institute

of Music in 1934. His *Symphony in One Movement* (1936) had already been performed by major American orchestras and at the prestigious Salzburg Festival. Arturo Toscanini's performances with the NBC Symphony of the first Essay for Orchestra and the Adagio for Strings, nationally broadcast on a concert in November 1938, had cemented Barber's fame.

A commission the following year to write a violin concerto came from Samuel S. Fels, magnate of Fels Naptha soap, Philadelphia philanthropist, and a Curtis Institute Board member, for Iso Briselli, a talented violinist and former classmate of Barber's. Barber began composing the work in Switzerland during the summer of 1939 and continued in Paris, which he left earlier than planned as the war broke out. He completed the Concerto the following summer. Although accounts vary as to the exact reasons, the commissioners were apparently not entirely pleased with what they saw of the piece. Barber tested the Concerto privately with piano accompaniment for friends and colleagues, and then arranged for the Curtis Institute Orchestra, conducted by Fritz Reiner, to read it through with a student named Herbert Baumel, who soon thereafter joined The Philadelphia Orchestra.

Lush Lyricism and a Pure Heart The Concerto received its official premiere in February 1941 with the American violinist Albert Spalding and The Philadelphia Orchestra under Eugene Ormandy. The work appeared on the second half of a program that also featured Spalding's performance of Mozart's D-major Concerto, K. 218. The critic for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* remarked: "The enduring beauty, grace, and freshness of the Mozart work provided a formidable challenge to the young American composer's offering in the same form. But it scored an exceptional popular success as was abundantly evident in the storm of applause that was showered on both the soloist, and the composer when he appeared on the stage." Other reviews likewise commented on the unusually enthusiastic

audience response to this work that fell so “pleasantly upon the ear.”

A few negative critical remarks echoed some made earlier about the *Adagio for Strings*: Barber’s music was not modern enough. The lush Romanticism, predominantly tonal harmonic language, and adherence to traditional forms were embraced by audiences and some critics, while dissenters complained that the music was old fashioned and pretentious. In his review of the *Concerto*, critic Henry Pleasants called Barber “one of the youngest and also one of the most ablest of what might be called the right wing of American composers.” Reacting to a performance in New York a few days after the Philadelphia premiere, critic and composer Virgil Thomson wrote that “the only reason Barber gets away with elementary musical methods is that his heart is pure.”

A Closer Look Eighty-four years later it is clear that the extraordinary success of the *Concerto* was not ephemeral. Barber’s unusual lyricism (he was a singer himself) made for especially memorable opening movements, which at times share the elegiac quality that had already proved so effective in the *Adagio for Strings*. The perpetual motion finale, written back in America as the war broke out, is more spiky in its harmony and rhythm. Barber provided the following program note for the premiere:

The Concerto for Violin and Orchestra was completed in July, 1940, at Pocono Lake Preserve, Pennsylvania, and is Mr. Barber’s most recent work for orchestra. It is lyric and rather intimate in character, and a moderate-sized orchestra is used; eight woodwinds, two horns, two trumpets, percussion, piano, and strings.

The first movement—*Allegro molto moderato*—begins with a lyrical first subject announced at once by the solo violin, without any orchestral introduction. This movement as a whole has perhaps more the character of sonata than concerto form. The second movement—*Andante sostenuto*—is introduced by an extended oboe solo. The violin enters with a contrasting and rhapsodic theme, after which it repeats the oboe melody of the beginning. The last movement, a perpetual motion, exploits the more brilliant and virtuosic characteristics of the violin.

Despite its initial success, Barber harbored some concerns about the piece and with what he felt were “an unsatisfactory climax in the adagio and some muddy orchestration in the finale.” He revised the *Concerto* in November 1948, making a few cuts, recasting the end of the second movement, and scaling back the orchestration at various points. He simplified the tempo indications of the first two movements, changing them to *Allegro* and *Andante*. The revised version was first heard in Boston in January 1949 and published later that year. The Philadelphia Orchestra did not present the *Concerto* again until 1957, and it was only in the late 1970s that it began to be a staple of the ensemble’s repertoire.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Christopher H. Gibbs is James H. Ottaway Jr. Professor of Music at Bard College and has been the program annotator for The Philadelphia Orchestra since 2000. He is the author of several books on Schubert and Liszt, and the co-author, with Richard Taruskin, of *The Oxford History of Western Music*, College Edition.

Barber composed his Violin Concerto from 1939 to 1940 and revised it in 1948.

Albert Spalding, Eugene Ormandy, and The Philadelphia Orchestra gave the world premiere of Barber's Violin Concerto in February 1941. The most recent Orchestra subscription performances were in February 2022, with Juliette Kang and Eun Sun Kim on the podium.

Barber scored the work for an orchestra of solo violin, two flutes (II doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, timpani, snare drum, piano, and strings.

The Concerto runs approximately 25 minutes in performance.

The Music

Symphony No. 4

Gustav Mahler

Born in Kalischt (Kaliště), Bohemia, July 7, 1860

Died in Vienna, May 18, 1911



By 19th-century standards Mahler's Fourth Symphony is imposing in its length and instrumentation, and unusual in ending with a movement that calls for a soprano soloist. But for later audiences, ones familiar with all of the composer's symphonies, the Fourth may seem rather modest, intimate, and Classical. It is Mahler's shortest symphony, calls for the smallest orchestra, and employs some conventional forms. This is one of Mahler's most "normal" symphonies and perhaps his "happiest." At least that is what many

commentators have said about it for well more than a century, despite the fact that with a composer so prone to irony things may never quite be as straightforward as they initially appear.

By 1901, when Mahler conducted the premiere of the Fourth in Munich, he was one of the leading musical figures in Europe. His ascension to the directorship of the Vienna Court Opera in 1897 had placed him in a position of extraordinary power and prestige, earning him adoring fans and implacable foes. The consuming demands of his job meant that time to compose came mainly during the summers, with revisions and orchestrations squeezed in when possible during the regular season.

The "World of My Fourth" After writing his first three symphonies, each longer and more complex than the preceding one, Mahler had reached something of a limit and in 1899 struck out in new directions. His earlier symphonies all had programs of some sort—stories, titles, and poems—extra-musical baggage that he increasingly sought to suppress: "Death to programs," he proclaimed at the time.

Mahler addressed the issue of the differences among his early symphonies while composing the Fourth. As he resumed work on the piece in 1900 he confided to a friend his fears of not being able to pick up where he had left off the summer before: "I must say I now find it rather hard to come to grips with things here again; I still live half in, half out of the world of my Fourth. It is so utterly different from my other symphonies. But that *must be*; I could never repeat a state of mind, and as life progresses I follow new paths in each new work."

From Song to Symphony The Fourth Symphony has a rather complicated genesis that is important for understanding its special character. For more than a decade, beginning in the late 1880s, Mahler was obsessed with *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn),

a collection of folk poetry compiled in the early 19th century. One of the poems, “Das himmlische Leben” (The Heavenly Life), relates a child’s innocent idea of blissful existence in heaven. Mahler first set the poem for voice and piano in February 1892 and orchestrated it soon thereafter. A few years later he decided to end his Third Symphony—destined to be the longest symphony ever written by a major composer—with that song as its seventh movement. He eventually changed his mind and chose to divert it to conclude his next symphony instead.

Mahler originally planned for the Fourth Symphony to have six movements, three of them songs, leading to “Das himmlische Leben.” Although he eliminated the other vocal movements, and suppressed as well most of the programmatic elements he had initially envisioned, the heavenly *Wunderhorn* song remained and in fact helped to generate the entire Symphony. Mahler called attention to this on a number of occasions, such as when he chided a critic that his analysis was missing one thing: “Did you overlook the thematic connections that figure so prominently in the work’s design? Or did you want to spare the audience some technical explanations? In any case, I ask that that aspect of my work be specially observed. Each of the three movements is connected thematically with the last one in the most intimate and meaningful way.”

Melodic, rhythmic, and instrumental ideas, drawn from both the vocal and orchestral parts of “Das himmlische Leben,” can be discovered in each of the three preceding movements. Mahler retained the rather modest orchestration of the original song, which omitted trombones and tuba, even though he regretted not having recourse to lower brass for the climax of the slow movement. The unusual instrumental sound of sleigh bells, which opens the first movement, is derived from the refrain that separates the stanzas of the song. Even the large-scale key scheme of the Symphony, the progressive tonality so rare before Mahler, comes from the song, in which G major leads to an ethereal E major.

From melody, to rhythm, to orchestration and tonal planning, “Das himmlische Leben” was the source of the Fourth Symphony and ultimately provided the spiritual vision as well. In the end, Mahler decided not to divulge its program. He told his friend Natalie Bauer-Lechner: “I know the most wonderful names for the movements, but I will not betray them to the rabble of critics and listeners so they can subject them to banal misunderstandings and distortions.” She also reports Mahler remarking: “At first glance one does not even notice all that is hidden in this inconspicuous little song, and yet one can recognize the value of such a seed by testing whether it contains the promise of a manifold life.” The rich image of the “seed” from which an enormous work grows is useful in understanding the importance of this song and its hold on Mahler.

A Closer Look The sounds of the sleigh bells that open the first movement (**Bedächtig**. **Nicht eilen**) set a pastoral tone that pervades the work. This sunny landscape, however, darkens in the middle of the movement. Mahler remarked on the mood of the Fourth being like “the uniform blue of the sky. ... Sometimes it becomes overcast and uncanny, horrific: but it is not heaven itself that darkens, for it goes on shining with its everlasting blue. It is only that to us it seems suddenly sinister.” Other clouds will pass in the following

movements, but the blue sky always returns.

The scherzo (**In gemächlicher Bewegung**) unleashes demonic powers. The concertmaster at points plays an instrument tuned up one tone. Mahler originally subtitled the movement “Friend Death Strikes up the Dance.” According to Mahler’s widow, Alma, her husband was “under the spell of the self-portrait by Arnold Böcklin, in which Death fiddles unto the painter’s ear.” The profound slow movement (**Ruhevoll**) has the character of a lullaby elaborated in a set of variations.

Despite all that precedes, the concluding vocal movement (**Sehr behaglich**) is not so much a culmination, as is the finale of Mahler’s earlier Second Symphony, but rather an arrival. The music is charming, wise, and difficult to pin down. Mahler provides an intriguing performance instruction: “To be sung with childlike, cheerful expression; entirely without parody.” Reacting to the last time Mahler conducted the work, with the Philharmonic Society of New York at Carnegie Hall in January 1911, a critic commented: “Mahler’s Symphony is more or less a puzzle. The composer did not provide titles for the individual movements for the Symphony as a whole. Through the artistic device of connecting the movements thematically and through the employment of a solo voice in the last movement Mr. Mahler admits, voluntarily or involuntarily, that his work is to be counted as program music.” Over a century later musicians and audiences are still discovering its richness and meanings.

—Christopher H. Gibbs

Mahler’s Symphony No. 4 was composed from 1899 to 1900 and was revised several times between 1901 and 1910.

Bruno Walter led the first Philadelphia Orchestra performances of the Symphony, in January 1946, with soprano Desi Halban as soloist. The most recent subscription performances took place in December 2022; Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducted and Pretty Yende was the soprano.

The score calls for soprano soloist, four flutes (III and IV doubling piccolo), three oboes (III doubling English horn), three clarinets (II doubling E-flat clarinet and III doubling bass clarinet), three bassoons (III doubling contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, timpani, percussion (bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, sleigh bells, suspended cymbal, triangle), harp, and strings.

Mahler’s Fourth runs approximately 60 minutes in performance.

“Das himmlische Leben”

(Achim von Arnim and
Clemens Brentano)

*Wir geniessen die himmlischen Freuden,
d’rum thun wir das Irdische meiden.
Kein weltlich’ Getümmel
hört man nicht im Himmel!
Lebt Alles in sanftester Ruh’.
Wir führen ein englisches Leben!
Sind dennoch ganz lustig daneben!
Wir tanzen und springen,
wir hüpfen und singen!
Sankt Peter im Himmel sieht zu!*

*Johannes das Lämmlein auslasset,
der Metzger Herodes drauf passet!
Wir führen ein geduldig’s,
unschuldig’s, geduldig’s,
ein liebliches Lämmlein zu Tod!
Sankt Lucas den Ochsen thät schachten
ohn’ einig’ Bedenken und Achten,
der Wein kost kein Heller
im himmlischen Keller,
die Englein, die backen das Brot.*

*Gut’ Kräuter von allerhand Arten,
die wachsen im himmlischen Garten!
Gut’ Spargel, Fisolen
und was wir nur wollen!
Ganze Schüsseln voll sind uns bereit!
Gut’ Äpfel, gut’ Birn’ und gut’ Trauben!
Die Gärtner, die Alles erlauben!
Willst Rehbock, willst Hasen,
auf offener Strassen
sie laufen herbei!*

*Sollt’ ein Fasttag etwa kommen
alle Fische gleich mit Freuden
angeschwommen!
Dort läuft schon Sankt Peter
mit Netz und mit Köder
zum himmlischen Weiher hinein.*

“Heavenly Life”

We savor the joys of heaven,
thus we avoid earthly things.
No worldly tumult
is heard in heaven!
All things live in gentlest peace.
We lead an angelic life!
Yet we’re quite merry anyway!
We dance and jump,
we hop and sing!
St. Peter in heaven looks on!

St. John lets the lamb out,
and Herod the butcher looks after it!
We lead a long-suffering
blameless, long-suffering,
dear lamb to its death!
St. Luke slaughters the ox
without giving it a thought;
the wine doesn’t cost a cent
in heaven’s cellar,
and the little angels bake bread.

Good vegetables of all sorts,
grow in the heavenly garden!
Good asparagus, snap beans,
and anything we like!
Whole platefuls are at our disposal!
Good apples, pears, and grapes!
The gardeners permit everything!
If you want deer, if you want rabbit,
they run right by
on the open road!

Should perhaps a holiday come,
all the fish swim up
with joy!
Look! St. Peter is already running
with net and bait
to the heavenly fish pond.

Text continued

*Sankt Martha die Köchin muss sein!
Kein' Musik ist ja nicht auf Erden,
die uns'rer verglichen kann werden.
Elftausend Jungfrauen
zu tanzen sich trauen!
Sankt Ursula selbst dazu lacht!
Cäcilia mit ihren Verwandten
sind treffliche Hofmusikanten!
Die englischen Stimmen ermuntern die Sinnen!
Dass Alles für Freuden erwacht.*

St. Martha has to be the cook!
There is no music on earth
that can be compared to ours.
Eleven thousand virgins
dare to dance!
Even St. Ursula laughs at the sight!
St. Cecilia and her relatives
are superb court musicians!
Angelic voices invigorate the senses!
So that all things awaken to joy!

English translation by Paul J. Horsley