



Saturday | **OCTOBER 17, 2026** | 7:30 pm

OPENING NIGHT: BREATHTAKING MAHLER AND GOOD

Guest Artists

James S. Kahane, *conductor*

Kerson Leong, *violin*



Presenting Partner: *Serenata Music*



London
CANADA

**JOSH MORGAN
MAYOR**

October 17, 2026

Dear Friends,

On behalf of London City Council, it is my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to London Symphonia's 2026–2027 Season. This year marks a particularly special occasion as London Symphonia celebrates its 10th Anniversary alongside the City of London's 200th Anniversary. Together, these milestones offer a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the creativity, talent, and community spirit that make our city such a vibrant place to live.

For a decade, London Symphonia has been a shining star in our city's artistic community. Through your commitment to musical excellence, you have brought exceptional performances to audiences across London and helped foster a deeper appreciation for orchestral music. Your concerts continue to create memorable experiences and demonstrate the important role the arts play in bringing our community together.

As you celebrate your 10th Anniversary, this season promises to be a memorable one. With eight exciting concerts featuring internationally renowned musicians, exceptional members of London Symphonia, and talented guest artists from London and the surrounding region, audiences will have many opportunities to experience the power and beauty of live music. This anniversary season is a wonderful reflection of both London Symphonia's artistic accomplishments and the remarkable talent found within our community.

Thank you for enriching our city through the arts and for helping make this a special year in London's history. I wish London Symphonia and all of its performers, artists, volunteers, supporters, and audiences a wonderful 10th Anniversary Season filled with memorable performances and shared inspiration.

Kind regards,

Josh Morgan
Mayor, City of London

City of London
Office of Mayor Josh Morgan
300 Dufferin Avenue
P.O. Box 5035
London, ON N6A 4L9

WELCOME TO LONDON SYMPHONIA'S BLOCKBUSTER 10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON!

We are thrilled to welcome you to **Opening Night: Breathtaking Mahler and Good**, an unforgettable kick-off to our year-long 10th Anniversary celebrations. With **stellar violinist Kerson Leong** returning to perform the world premiere of ***Yinyang***, **Composer-In-Residence Scott Good's first concerto for violin and orchestra**, the epic music of **Mahler's Symphony No. 1**, and **James S. Kahane's London Symphonia conducting debut**, we look forward into the decade to come and honour music from the past.

Our concert programs throughout 2026-27 are bigger and bolder than ever thanks to the **Paul Seed Fund**, our **10th Anniversary Season Sponsor**. Our concert programs are brimming with exciting artistic experiences, specially crafted to take you on new musical journeys of exploration and discovery. We hope you will return often to join in the celebrations. If you haven't already **sign up for our e-newsletter** [HERE](#) so you don't miss a beat.

The Concert Video Production of **Opening Night: Breathtaking Mahler and Good** will be available on our **Watch and Listen** video on demand channel. You can subscribe or rent individual concerts from our treasure trove of outstanding performances from the past four seasons along with companion materials. Click [HERE](#) to find out more.

Thank you for being **part of our musical family** and continuing on this journey of growth with us. We are **deeply grateful to all our patrons, donors, sponsors, funders and volunteers**, past and present, for enabling us to reach this 10th Anniversary milestone. Your commitment has enabled us to bring the joy and transformative power of music to people of all ages – from tots to seniors – through outstanding performances and through our comprehensive education and outreach programs. **On behalf of the musicians, staff, and Board of Directors, our heartfelt thanks for your support.**

We hope you will enjoy tonight's concert and spread the word about our 10th Anniversary Season to family and friends.

Sincerely,



April Voth
Executive Director



Andrew Chung
Artistic Producer

PROGRAM

OPENING NIGHT: BREATHTAKING MAHLER AND GOOD

OCTOBER 17, 2026 | 7:30 pm | Metropolitan United

Presenting Partner:

Serenata Music

Guest Artists

James S. Kahane, *conductor*

Kerson Leong, *violin*

SCOTT GOOD

Yinyang

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra

World Premiere

- I. Wuji
- II. Yang
- III. Yin
- IV. Taiji

We are grateful for the funding support received for the composition of this work from the



GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 in D Major, "Titan"

(reduced orchestration for Chamber Orchestra by Yoon Jae Lee)

- I. Langsam, schleppend. Wie ein Naturlaut. (Slowly, dragging. Like a sound of nature.)
- II. Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell. (Moving vigorously, but not too fast.)
- III. Feierlich und gemessen, ohne zu schleppen. (Solemn and measured, without dragging.)
- IV. Stürmisch bewegt. (With stormy emotion.)

The program runs approximately 2 hours, including a 20-minute intermission.

INTERMISSION



MEET KERSON LEONG, JAMES KAHANE, SCOTT GOOD AND THE MUSICIANS OF LONDON SYMPHONIA AND CELEBRATE THE LONDON YOUTH SYMPHONY JOINING OUR LONDON SYMPHONIA FAMILY!

Join us in the Great Room immediately behind the stage. Reception sponsored by Daina Janitis and Carol Kehoe.

TONIGHT'S MUSICIANS

Violin 1

Joe Lanza
Mikela Witjes
Cecilia Chang
Calvin Tsang
Mel Martin
Julian Trippell
Andrew Bensler
Yanet Campbell-Secades

Violin 2

Andrew Chung
Sarah Wiebe
Michele Dumoulin
Natasha Penny
Alyssa Stevenson†
Erin Van Dyke*
Sheilanne Lindsay

Viola

Kelvin Enns†
Cian Diamond*
Marie-Eve Lessard†
Tasman Tantasawat*
Jaqueline Milne
John Wiebe

Cello

Ben Bolt-Martin†
Deverson Correia*
Sonya Nanos-Hodgson†
Abigail Greenland*
Patrick Theriault
Joel Tangjerd

Bass

Joe Phillips
Brian Baty
Fil Stasiak

Flute

Laura Chambers
Stephen Tam

Oboe
Ari Cohen Mann
David Vanbiesbrouk

Clarinet

Graham Lord
Marc Blouin

Bassoon

Julie Shier
Kevin Harris

Horn

Amanda Bolger
Kate Stone
Sasha Gorbasesw
Timothy Lockwood
Ron George

Trumpet

Shawn Spicer
Michael Barth

Trombone

Mike Polci
Peter Collins

Tuba

Brent Adams

Timpani

Tim Francom

Percussion

Dave Robilliard
Brennan Connelly

Harp

Alanna Ellison

Guzheng

Lina Cao

* London Symphonia Fellows from Western University
† Mentor: London Symphonia Fellows from Western University

Photography and video/audio recording of any kind is not permitted during the performance.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

London Symphonia wishes to acknowledge and honour the land on which we are meeting as the traditional territory of the First Nations peoples; the Chippewa of the Thames First Nation (part of the Anishinaabe), the Oneida Nation of the Thames (part of the Haudenosaunee) and the Munsee-Delaware Nation (part of the Leni-Lunaape). Let us reflect on how we as individuals and as a community can carry this spirit of gratitude into everything we do to honour the work that all the First Nations peoples of the Turtle Island have done, and continue to do, for the land that supports us all.

BIOS



JAMES S. KAHANE

James S. Kahane is the Music Director of the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra, Principal Conductor of the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra and

Principal Conductor of the Orchestre de Chambre de la Drôme. Commended for his ability to “weave the musical phrases together with flexibility and determination, as well as the musicians between them.” (Bachtrack) and to “take the orchestra to its extremes” (Keskisuomalainen), Kahane has worked with first-rate orchestras around the world such as the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra or the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. His debut album with the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra, released by Resonus Classics, has been lauded as a “colossal album that will inspire for generations to come” (The Flute View).

With a wealth of experience in both the symphonic and operatic worlds, Kahane conducted productions of operas such as Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Bizet's *The Tragedy of Carmen*, Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and Kokkonen's *The Last Temptations* among others, as well as world premieres of operas such as Kon's *Bas Sheve* or Tuurna's *Years of Silence*. He has been a regular guest conductor at the Finnish Chamber Opera and was also a conductor at the Helsinki Contemporary Opera Festival on several

occasions. Kahane was the Assistant Conductor to Hannu Lintu at the Bayerische Staatsoper for their production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Debussy during the Spring of 2024, for which he was glowingly and publicly credited by Lintu, and at the Bregenzer Festspiele the following Spring for their production of *Œdipe* by George Enescu.

Recent years have seen Kahane guest conducting internationally, appearing with orchestras such as the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the Orchestre National de Mulhouse, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, the Miroirs Étendus Ensemble, the Jyväskylä Sinfonia, the St. Michel Strings and the Pori Sinfonietta. He was Susanna Mälkki's Assistant Conductor at the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra for their 2017/2018 season, where he worked at her side and with the orchestra's guest conductors, aged only 21 at the time. In 2018, Kristjan Järvi invited him to conduct the Baltic Academies Orchestra in Berlin for their first international tour, and the following year, Kahane was offered a conducting fellowship at the Atlantic Music Festival in the United States, where he worked during the summer of 2019.

Since 2016, Kahane has been the conductor of the Far(away) Ensemble, a modular and multidisciplinary ensemble dedicated to performing the music of composer Jacopo Aliboni, with whom he recorded the score for the short films *Du Temps Perdu* and *Le Temps Prend Feu*, with the later notably featured at the 70th Cannes Festival. He became in 2018 the

conductor of the Polytech Orchestra, succeeding a long line of esteemed conductors among which Jorma Panula, Sakari Oramo, Dimitri Slobodeniouk and Eva Ollikainen, and in 2019, Kahane contributed to the refounding of the Helsinki Chamber Orchestra, of which he subsequently became Principal Conductor. In 2023, he was also appointed Principal Conductor of the Orchestre de chambre de la Drôme in France. In May 2024, the Hamilton Philharmonic Orchestra announced James S. Kahane as their 9th Music Director, starting the 2024/2025 season.

Kahane was admitted at the age of 19 to the prestigious Orchestral Conducting class of the Sibelius Academy, where he studied with Sakari Oramo, Hannu Lintu and Atso Almila. From there, he went on to be invited to the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, to Bernard Haitink's conducting masterclass at the Lucerne Music Festival and to the prestigious Tanglewood Music Festival. He benefited during these years from the teaching of many prominent conductors such as Paavo Järvi, Neeme Järvi, David Zinman, Peter Eötvös, Matthias Pintscher, Sir Roger Norrington, John Storgårds, Mikko Franck, Leif Segerstam, Johannes Schlaefli, Nicolas Pasquet and Jorma Panula.

Kahane was one of the three protagonists of the documentary movie *Conductivity*, which followed him during his study years at the Sibelius Academy. The movie was released in the Finnish movie theatres in February of 2020.



KERSON LEONG

Kerson Leong has been described as “not just one of Canada’s greatest violinists but one of the greatest violinists, period” (Toronto Star). Since

his First Prize win at the International Yehudi Menuhin Violin Competition in 2010 he continues to win over colleagues and audiences alike with “a mixture of spontaneity and mastery, elegance, fantasy, intensity that makes his sound recognizable from the first notes” (Le Monde).

A recording artist for Alpha Classics, his albums have been awarded ‘Editor’s Choice’ by Gramophone, ‘The Strad Recommends’ by The Strad, and the ‘Choc de Classica’ by Classica as well as five-star recommendations from the Sunday Times and Diapason among others. His latest album, featuring works by Gabriel Fauré with pianist Jonathan Fournel, was released in late May 2026.

Highlights of the 2026/27 season include his debut at the Amsterdam Concertgebouw as soloist with the Nederlands Kamerorkest during a tour around the Netherlands, as well as his debut in South Korea, where he appears with the Korean Chamber Orchestra in Seoul. The season also sees a tour of Sweden as soloist with the Camerata Nordica. Further orchestral debuts include the Orchestra of Teatro Verdi di Trieste, the Louisville Orchestra, the Colorado Springs Philharmonic, the Elgin Symphony, and the

Kaohsiung Symphony Orchestra, and he has been invited by pianist Alexandre Tharaud to join him in recital at the Cité de la Musique in Paris.

A sought-after soloist, he was hand-picked by Yannick Nézet-Séguin to be his artist-in-residence with the Orchestre Métropolitain during the 18/19 season and has performed in such prestigious venues as Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium, Wigmore Hall, the Auditorium du Louvre and the National Center for the Performing Arts in Beijing. Past highlights include performances with such ensembles as the Royal, Oslo, and Brussels Philharmonic Orchestras, the Seattle, Singapore, Toledo, Montreal, Tucson, and Wuppertal Symphony Orchestras, as well as recording John Rutter's *Visions* with the composer himself and the Aurora Chamber Orchestra, after giving its world premiere in London, UK.

As an avid chamber musician, he has performed at such international festivals and concert series as the Rheingau Musik Festival, Gstaad Menuhin Festival, Festspiele Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Flâneries musicales de Reims, and Bergen International Festival among others. Passionate about pedagogy and music outreach, he has been invited to give masterclasses at various festivals and universities including the Colburn School, the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, the Gustav Mahler Academy, the Avos Project in Rome among others.

Fostering a significant audience away from the concert hall as well, he is cementing his noteworthy role in reaching young people, aspiring musicians, and potential music lovers alike with his art in creative and engaging ways on social media. He is an associate artist of the Queen Elisabeth Music Chapel in Belgium, where he was mentored by Augustin Dumay.

He has been keen on making connections between music and other fields. Ever since his dad started introducing him to physics concepts about string resonance, they have strongly influenced his playing and philosophy on sound production. Together with his dad, he has given lectures about this subject in places such as the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, the Barratt-Due Music Institute in Oslo, and various universities in California.

Kerson performs on the 1741 'ex Bohrer, Baumgartner' Guarneri del Gesu courtesy of Canimex Inc, Drummondville (Quebec), Canada.



SCOTT GOOD

Scott Good is a composer, conductor, concert designer and trombonist whose music is driven by the desire to create beauty, evoke emotion, and play with groove. With a belief in the power

of art to enable cathartic events, he has worked with a rich community of musicians, orchestras, ensembles, choreographers, actors, and artists to create intense, meaningful live performance experiences. His music has been described as “a kind of majestic bestial reality” (Globe and Mail), “gloriously cacophonous” (Ottawa Citizen), “sumptuously orchestrated” (Montreal Gazette), and “dynamic, vivid” (Winnipeg Free Press).

He has composed numerous orchestral works and orchestral arrangement since 2015 in his role of Composer-in-Residence with London Symphonia and previously as Composer-in-Residence with the Vancouver Symphony (2008-2011). *Yinyang*, his first concerto for violin and orchestra, will be performed by the internationally acclaimed violinist Kerson Leong at London Symphonia’s 2026 opening night concert. His dynamic song cycle, *Lasker-Schüler Songs* for rising star soprano Midori Marsh and London Symphonia was premiered in 2024. Upcoming projects for orchestra include two silent film scores: *The Passion of Joan of Arc* for a mixture of voices and period instruments to be premiered by Ensemble Caprice in Montreal in 2026, and a two-and-a-half hour score for large orchestra and chorus to the epic silent film classic *Metropolis* with the Kingston Symphony, celebrating the film’s 100th anniversary (2027).

He has been commissioned by orchestras across Canada, including Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, National Arts Centre Orchestra, Calgary Philharmonic, Winnipeg Symphony, Orchestre de la francophonie, and the Esprit Orchestra. Major works include his orchestral score for the 1926 silent film *The Hands of Orlac* (Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony 2015), his multimedia family concert *The Caboose Who Got Loose* with solo cello, narration, and projections (Calgary Philharmonic 2022), and his acclaimed trumpet concerto, *Between the Rooms* “a riotous, percussive bacchanal” (For the Record) with Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony in 2007.

Inspired by the themes of the universal human condition, his lush oratorio *The Sleepers* contemplates the unity and equality of all humanity, whereas *Babbitt*, a raucous saxophone concerto, hailed by The Vancouver Observer as “luminous, virtuosic, gleaming music”, is inspired by a mid-life crisis. From global extinction cataclysm in his Kurt Vonnegut-inspired jazz orchestra work *Galapagos*, to a boiling stew in his overture *What the Chickpea Said to the Cook*, Scott finds inspiration to create compelling works from all walks and perspectives.

Good’s role has evolved over time to include artistic direction, where he meshes his conducting skills with his knowledge as a composer and arranger to design and produce innovative concerts. These programs focus on modern compositions and hybrid genre music that imbue a widely inclusive atmosphere for our culturally diverse communities. Events of interest include *Belonging*, a concert of Arabic songs and classical Western compositions with poet/activist

Najwa Zebian and songwriter Maryem Toller; *In Remembrance*, combining classical music with contemporary and traditional songs to reflect the deep, conflicted emotions around the topic of war and sacrifice; and *Tapestry*, a collaboration with The Light of East Ensemble exploring the music of the East Mediterranean. His aim with these diverse programs is to create bridges and connections revealing our common humanity through music.

Good has an extensive catalogue of chamber music compositions and has created works for ensembles such as I Furiosi, and the Madawaska String Quartet, organizations such as InnerChamber and the World Harp Congress, and soloists including trombonist Alain Trudel, and electric guitarist Tim Brady. He has composed test pieces for the Montreal International Music Competition, the Canadian Music Competition, and written for education institutions such as the Glenn Gould School and NACO Young Artists program. He has composed several pieces for children as part of Chamber Factory's *Listen Up!* program and served as a mentor in Esprit Orchestra's Creative Sparks high school program. Current chamber projects include music direction and arranging for the *Lonely Child Project*, a contemporary music/contemporary circus hybrid theatrical work in collaboration with multi-hyphenate artist Stacie Dunlop and contemporary circus artists Angola Murdoch and Holly Treddenick, with the music of Claude Vivier (2017-present).

Scott Good's passion for jazz and improvised music can be heard throughout his compositions, especially in hybrid projects with jazz artists and musicians from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Highlights include two major works for the Hard Rubber Jazz Orchestra, *Concerto for Cello* composed for Jeffrey Zeigler, and *Concerto for Improvisor* featuring Scott as composer, conductor, and soloist, the concert length crossover project *Conjunction*, revered as "one of the most fascinating concerts I've heard this year" by the Ottawa Jazz Scene, with the Gryphon Trio, jazz bassist Roberto Occhipinti and American-Cuban drummer Dafnis Prieto, including arrangements and original composition *Wu Xing* (2018), and his 10-part tribute to author Kurt Vonnegut Vonnegut and the *Slaughterhouse Orchestra* co-written with singer-songwriter Dwight Schenk for rock band and chamber orchestra.

Scott lives in London Ontario with his wife Jennifer Schofield and two children Alex and Nick.

PROGRAM NOTES

Composer's Note by Scott Good

Yinyang – Concerto for Violin and Orchestra is a 36-minute work that also features the *guzheng* (Chinese zither) and alto flute as distinctive colours within the ensemble. It is dedicated to violinist Kerson Leong with London Symphonia, and Bénédicte Lauzière, Concertmaster with the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony.

It has long been an ambition of mine to compose a significant violin concerto inspired by the philosophy of dualism.

The concept of duality is endlessly fascinating: the interdependent existence of complementary opposites. There can be no hot without cold, no light without darkness, and no sound without silence. This perspective is expressed profoundly in the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang, as well as in ancient Hermetic writings, which serve as important points of inspiration in shaping the musical ideas of this work.

Dualistic principles extend across all realms of existence – physical, mental, and spiritual. Emotions themselves arise in pairs of opposites: happiness and sadness, tension and relaxation, love and fear. Throughout nature, the universe reveals itself through the dynamic interplay of complementary forces.

Music expresses this principle with particular clarity. Musical drama emerges through contrast: soft and loud, fast and slow, high and low, bright and dark. Melody moves while harmony provides

stillness. Tonal music balances consonance and dissonance, activity and repose. Through these opposing forces, music seeks balance while creating its distinctive colours and identities.

Yinyang employs these principles at every structural level. Modes, rhythms, melodies, and textures are conceived in complementary relationships, with musical ideas paired or contrasted with their opposites. These forces interact in both tension and equilibrium, allowing diverse influences to mingle and form a vivid tapestry of sound.

The four-movement structure unfolds like a creation myth, loosely inspired by these philosophical ideas:

- 1. Wuji** – Infinite emptiness. A nearly motionless melody slowly descends before dissolving into a chaotic emergence that gives birth to Yin and Yang.
- 2. Yang** – Dynamic, assertive, and fiery. Yang's energy becomes volatile as melodies fragment and bright orchestral textures challenge the violin soloist.
- 3. Yin** – Calm follows Yang's turbulence. The violin interacts intimately with *guzheng* and alto flute, drawing the listener into the softest musical gestures.
- 4. Taiji** – The reconciliation of opposites. Yin and Yang begin to embody one another as contrasting musical elements fuse into a resonant whole.

Through *Yinyang*, I aim to create a work that is emotionally compelling and conceptually engaging, while pushing the violin toward new virtuosic possibilities.

Commission funding supported by the London Arts Council Community Arts Investment Program, the Ontario Arts Council Music Creation Project grant, and London Symphonia.

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 1 in D major, “Titan”

Reduced orchestration for Chamber Orchestra by Yoon Jae Lee

“The First [Symphony] has not yet been grasped by anyone who has not lived with me.”

Gustav Mahler, c.1901, undated letter to the author of a monograph on his works

Said no one else ever. But Mahler’s conviction that his First Symphony was a hard sell is borne out in a 1906 letter to a conductor proposing to perform his music in Paris: “On no account would I advise the First; it is very hard to understand. Even the Sixth or Fifth would be preferable.” Today these statements are eyebrow raising; nobody has been living with Mahler for well over a century now, and his First Symphony is now his most frequently performed. So obviously times have changed.

What happened was 50 years of growing respect for Mahler the composer. During his lifetime and

after Mahler was principally known as one of the greatest conductors of his day – after holding posts of increasing importance in opera houses from small towns to Prague, Leipzig, Budapest and Hamburg, in 1897 he assumed the Directorship of the Vienna Imperial Opera, considered the prize of Europe – and that of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in 1898. Following his tenure in Vienna he crossed the Atlantic to join the Metropolitan Opera, becoming conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra the next year. However, his 45 songs and 10 massive symphonies (including the ‘song-symphony’ *The Song of the Earth*) were met with hostility, at first dismissed as ‘conductor music’ – the large body of technically competent but forgettable works produced by music directors everywhere – and later rejected as outrageously modern and insufferably long. Modernism, of course, is perishable, and it soon moved far beyond what upset Mahler’s audiences. Length is a challenge that can be overcome with study and familiarity, and the publication of Mahler’s scores, along with the mid-century advent of long-playing recordings, made his music increasingly accessible to a broader public. By 1971 Mahler was on the soundtrack of an award-winning film (*Death in Venice*), and his symphonies had become standard orchestral repertory.

Mahler’s path to his First Symphony was long and difficult, however. After studies in piano and composition at the Vienna Conservatory he was obliged in 1880 to take up conducting – for which he had had no training – to earn a living. Increasing success meant less time for composition; yet he still completed his first

substantial work that year, the cantata *Das klagende Lied* (Song of Lamentation), along with three songs, one of which would inspire the horn theme of the symphony's scherzo. Over the next four years Mahler advanced his conducting career, but it was not until 1884 with some incidental music for a play that the First Symphony began to take shape: an episode (entitled *Blumine* – poetically, ‘flowers’) was eventually repurposed as its second movement. The year ended with *Songs of a Wayfarer*, four songs with piano written for a soprano with whom Mahler was in love; two of these contributed themes to the first and third movements of his symphony. In fact, in constructing his whole first movement from the melody of a song Mahler made musical history. But work in the theatre and completion of an unfinished opera by Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) occupied him over much of the next two years, and it was spring of 1888 before the First Symphony was finished in four-hand piano score: he wrote to his parents that his emotions “became so powerful in me that they gushed forth like an impetuous torrent...at a single blow all the floodgates were opened within me!”

The emotions Mahler was referring to flowed from a torrid love affair he was having with the wife of Weber's grandson, which nearly resulted in the couple running away together (she stood him up at the train station). And truthfully, as with also the *Wayfarer Songs*, love affairs were a frequent spur to Mahler's inspiration (indeed, his reputation for such entanglements occasionally interfered with his employment prospects). In the case of the First Symphony he explained to a critic, “The symphony

goes far beyond the love affair on which it is based...which preceded it in the emotional life of its creator. The external event was only the occasion – so cannot be the subject of the work...As I find it trite to try to invent music to fit a programme, I regard it as unsatisfactory and unfruitful to try to make programme notes for a piece of music.” This was hindsight: after the unenthusiastic reception of the nascent First Symphony under the title “Symphonic Poem” at its 1889 debut in Budapest, Mahler – who was undecided whether to call his five-movement piece a symphony or a symphonic poem – had been persuaded to add suggestive titles to each movement of what he now termed *Titan: Tone Poem in Symphonic Form*, in reference to German author Jean Paul's eponymous novel. This revised version, which sported a paragraph-long explanation of the fourth movement Funeral March, fared better in 1893 with its audience in Hamburg – but less so with the critics and even less so in Weimar the following year. So, for the 1896 Berlin premiere, Mahler again revised the work, excised the titles, dropped *Blumine* altogether, and called it just *Symphony in D Major*. To no avail, however – the Funeral March, now the symphony's third movement, was still booed and the critics were unrelenting. This remained the pattern for subsequent performances in Vienna (1900) and elsewhere. Mahler's comment after the Vienna concert was more resigned than anguished: “The First Symphony is and will always remain my child of sorrow!”

The difficulties that audiences – and critics – had with the work stem from several sources. One objection was perceived dissonant

harmony; another was the sheer volume in the last movement of the largest orchestra yet employed in a symphony. Still another was the satire and parody in the Funeral March, which were an unfamiliar – and for many, an unwelcome – presence in the concert hall. And there was a fourth, unpleasant factor contributing to the negative reception of Mahler's works: the widespread and systemic anti-Semitism then prevalent in Europe. Later, Mahler was obliged to convert to Catholicism to accept the Directorship of the Imperial Opera, which however did not eliminate this element of antagonism toward his music.

Today, what was considered outrageous dissonance in the 1890s passes unnoticed; orchestral volume is dwarfed by amplifiers; and satire and parody are held in check only by lawyers. However, what remains confusing about Mahler's First Symphony is defining the so-called meaning of the piece – what did the cuckoos, the children's songs, the startling outburst of the last movement and other oddities mean? And here is the problem: he gave three very different answers to that question.

The first version was that the symphony is based upon the experience of a love affair, as quoted above. Next came the descriptions in the vaguely programmatic titles and notes issued for the 1893 Hamburg performance. Subsequently suppressed from the published score, they were nonetheless even elaborated in a long letter to a prominent critic prior to the Vienna premiere in 1900, in which an imagined strong hero delights in nature in the

first movement (ending with his laughter in the solo timpani); who voyages the world in the second movement; who witnesses a funeral procession in the third movement and reflects bitterly on all the sorrow in the world – and which buffeting sorrow he suffers in the Finale, at last triumphing over death, in Mahler's description, to "a great victorious chorale!"

The third answer Mahler gave is that there is no programme beyond his own "obscure feelings" stemming from real life experiences that opened a gate "into the 'other world'... in which things no longer fall apart in time and space".

O-kaayyy....

So the inquiring mind must make a choice. Some who have opted for love see in the four movements a pattern of spring-like joy in a fresh love; the adventure of shared experiences; the bitter death of the affair; and the anger and tormented memories afterward, ending in either reconciliation or the incredible relief of deliverance. Others accept the narrative and try to make the music fit. And the rest must forget about Jean Paul, simply take the music as it is and enjoy it until the gate opens into the other world – which seems to be what Mahler actually wanted. Or perhaps, as Hemingway had it, "There is no one thing that is true – it is all true."

A few musical and textual details are relevant. That the cuckoo in the introduction sings a lower second note than your average cuckoo clock is because the *Wayfarer* song Mahler later quotes as his main theme begins with

these two notes. The original song does evoke spring in that the traveller describes a morning walk in a dewy, sunny field amidst cheery birdcalls and bright flowers. The timpani ‘laughter’ at the end is a nine-fold repetition of the same two ‘cuckoo’ notes.

In the Scherzo the suave and elegant Trio is based on a rustic Austrian dance called a ländler. Is this Love? Or Adventure?

The third movement was the most contentious in the symphony, requiring the most clarification; Mahler described it as “A Funeral March in the Manner of Callot”. Jacques Callot was a 17th-century French artist renowned for his etchings, and in particular a whimsical one entitled “The Huntsman’s Funeral”, in which weeping forest animals transport a casket bearing his shotgun while carrying torches and playing instruments. This was a familiar illustration in Austrian children’s books, and so Mahler began with a familiar children’s round, *Brother Martin* (*Frère Jacques* to us) grotesquely transposed into the minor key and dryly given to a solo double bass in a very high register. This irony either went completely over the heads of his listeners, or provoked outrage at such impertinence in the serious forum of symphonic music, or both. A second melody with a distinct klezmer cast, is a parody of the (apparently miserable) village bands the composer himself heard as a child and corresponds to Callot’s bestial musicians. Again, the sarcasm fell flat in audiences expecting a spiritual – or at least

anodyne – experience in the slow movement of a symphony. And a third theme, taken from the last *Wayfarer* song and scored for three solo violins, strikes a painfully nostalgic tone of regret, perhaps more suited to a man recalling a lost love – as in the song – than to a hunter’s mourners.

The Finale, which explodes on the heels of the procession (the score directs ‘immediately’), was entitled *From the Inferno*, a reference to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, with the added note that it follows the march “like the last despairing cry of a wounded heart.” Whether the heart is the hero’s or Mahler’s is a fair question. The middle section both recalls the first movement and foreshadows the conclusion: the protagonist is deluded that he has won his battle – but not yet! When he does, the horn section is requested in the score to deliver the final chorale theme standing up – a very effective if theatrical gesture that strengthens and directs attention to the triumphal hymn.

Finally, Mahler never stopped believing in his First Symphony: in a letter to his wife in 1903, after a rehearsal with a well-prepared orchestra in Poland, he wrote, “Sometimes it sent shivers down my spine. Damn it all, where do people keep their ears and their hearts if they can’t hear that!”

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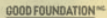
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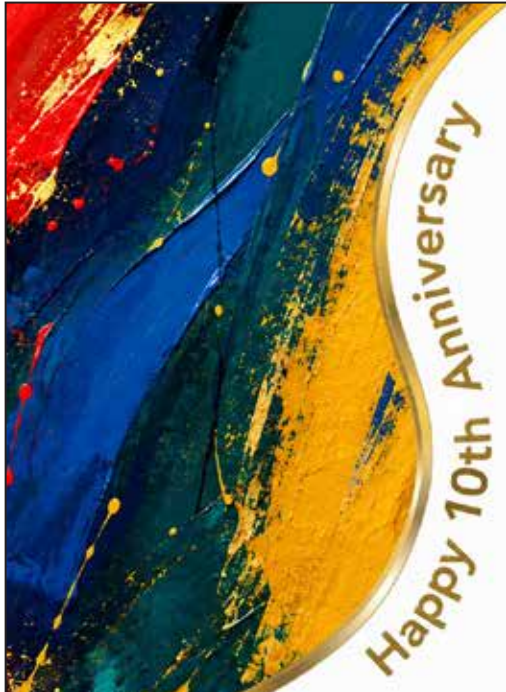
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