

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA
FACULTY
CHAMBER MUSIC
SERIES

Song of the Earth:
A Week with Gustav Mahler

*The School of Music pays tribute to the celebrated
late-Romantic Austrian composer, Gustav Mahler*

Saturday, January 11, 2014, 8:00 p.m.
Pre-concert talk at 7:30 p.m. with Harald Krebs

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall
MacLaurin Building, University of Victoria
Adults: \$17.50 / Students & seniors: \$13.50

PROGRAM

Das Lied von der Erde

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)
arr. Arnold Schönberg / Rainer Riehn

1. *Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde*
2. *Der Einsame im Herbst*
3. *Von der Jugend*
4. *Von der Schönheit*
5. *Der Trunkene im Frühling*
6. *Der Abschied*

Suzanne Snizek, flute & piccolo
Alexandra Pohran Dawkins, oboe & English horn
Patricia Kostek, clarinet & bass clarinet
Jenny Gunter, bassoon
Alana Despins, horn
Michelle Mares, piano
Harald Krebs, harmonium & celeste
Aaron Mattock & Alexei Paish, percussion
Ann Elliott-Goldschmid & Sharon Stanis, violin
Joanna Hood, viola
Pamela Highbaugh Aloni, cello
Alex Olsen, double bass
Benjamin Butterfield, tenor
Nathaniel Watson, baritone
Ajtony Csaba, conductor (*Der Abschied*)

PROGRAM NOTES

1907 was a difficult year for Gustav Mahler. In July, his daughter Maria died of scarlet fever. Soon thereafter, Mahler was diagnosed with a dangerous heart condition. Furthermore, he felt compelled to give up his longstanding directorship of the Vienna Court Opera because, in his own words, "he could no longer endure the rabble." On the one hand, he was happy to be rid of the tensions that the position brought with it, but on the other, he missed it and became nervous and irritable.

Although Mahler's creative capacities lay fallow during 1907, the events of this year left their mark on his major composition of the following year—*Das Lied von der Erde*. In October 1907, the poet Hans Bethge published a volume of poems based on works by Li Po and other Chinese poets, entitled *The Chinese Flute*. It is uncertain when this volume came into Mahler's hands, but during 1908 he began to draft settings of seven of Bethge's poems and to forge them into a unique song-symphony composed of six songs or movements (the final song sets two related poems). Mahler prepared versions of the work for voices and piano and for voices and orchestra; the voices were to be alto and tenor in alternation, with the alto potentially replaced by baritone. The version to be performed tonight is an arrangement (begun by Arnold Schoenberg in 1921, and completed in the 1980s by the German composer Rainer Riehn) for chamber ensemble, including piano, harmonium and celeste. Since the scoring of Mahler's full orchestral version is for the most part delicate and economical, an arrangement for smaller ensemble works exceedingly well.

The poems Mahler selected focus on various significant aspects of life, and, not surprisingly, given Mahler's recent experiences, on death. In the first song, entitled "Drinking Song of the Sorrow of the Earth," we three times hear the refrain "Dark is life, [dark] is death," and at the shattering climax we are confronted with the horrifying image of an ape crouched on a grave, howling out into the night. Mahler's music for this text, however, possesses a triumphant élan that suggests the surmounting of the darkness of death. In the melancholy second song, "The Lonely Man in Autumn," autumnal images such as mist, frost, wind, and withered leaves are juxtaposed with allusions to fatigue and the need for comfort and love. The third, fourth, and fifth songs, "Of Youth," "Of Beauty," and "The Drunkard in Springtime," are lighter in mood, both poetically and musically. The poem that underlies "Of Youth" refers to a group of friends drinking, chatting, and writing verses; the music is dominated by flowing eighth notes tracing the pentatonic scale. "Of Beauty" relates an encounter between a group of beautiful maidens and a horde of macho horsemen. The maidens' charms are evoked by gentle, graceful music that again features the pentatonic scale, whereas the brief intrusion of the men is represented by appropriately loud and forceful music of a martial character. The "Drunkard in Springtime" spends his life drinking,

singing, and sleeping, caring nothing for the passing of time. Mahler's music recaptures the bacchantic energy of the first song without, however, returning to its tragic quality.

The sixth and final song, "The Farewell," is as long as the others put together. The first of the two poems that Mahler selected for this song describes a man waiting for his friend in the beauty of evenfall. In the second poem, the friend has come but, in search of rest for his lonely heart, is about to depart again on a long journey. There is no doubt that this is the journey of death—but here, in contrast to the first song, death is represented in a gentle, transcendent light. The close of Mahler's music, suffused with ethereal arpeggios from the celeste, creates the effect of looking down at the beauty of the world from an increasing distance as the final journey into eternity begins.

Mahler was concerned about the effect of this work on the public; he asked his student Bruno Walter (who was destined to conduct the premiere of *Das Lied* in 1911, after Mahler's death) whether listeners wouldn't go out and commit suicide after hearing it. May our listeners' reactions after tonight's performance rather be like those of Schoenberg and Webern after playing through the score (as described in a letter from Webern to Berg): "We could not speak"!

Harald Krebs

BIOGRAPHIES

Benjamin Butterfield, tenor

Regarded by the Washington Post as a tenor who sings "...with taste, authority and agility...", Benjamin Butterfield has performed across North America, throughout Europe and in Asia. Recent highlights have included Haydn's *Die Schöpfung* with the Orchestra of St. Lukes at Carnegie Hall, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* at the Kennedy Center and Mozart arias and duets with the American Classical Orchestra at Lincoln Center in New York. Upcoming engagements include Mozart's *Requiem* with the Augusta Symphony, Bach's *B minor Mass* with the Bach Choir of Bethlehem and touring with pianist Arthur Rowe to the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas performing Janacek's *The diary of one who disappeared*. Mr. Butterfield has recorded for Analekta, Dorion, CBC, Koch and Timpani.

Nathaniel Watson, baritone

Baritone Nathaniel Watson is a versatile artist who has performed successfully in a wide variety of musical styles. Originally from Boston, Mr. Watson attended the Eastman School of Music and Yale University. Career highlights have included performing in *Der Freischütz* with the New York Philharmonic under Sir Colin Davis, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony under Kurt Masur, and in Carnegie Hall with Sir Roger Norrington. He has appeared with the Boston Early Music Festival, Tanglewood and at the Utrecht Festival in Holland, as well as being featured in the Salzburg Festival production of Weill's *Mahagonny*. Recent seasons have included performances of Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra; *Messiah* with the National Symphony at the Kennedy Center; Mahler's 8th Symphony with Orchestre symphonique de Québec; and Handel's *Semele* with Pacific Opera Victoria. He is featured in recordings of the Bach Passions: the St. Matthew with American Bach Soloists (San Francisco), and the St. John with Arion Baroque Orchestra (Montreal).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sunday, January 12, 2:30 p.m. (\$17.50 & \$13.50)

FACULTY CONCERT SERIES: Eugene Dowling, tuba

With Michelle Mares, piano and the Pinnacle Brass Quintet

A mostly Canadian concert with works by Barbara York, Elizabeth Raum, Oskar Morawetz, David L. MacIntyre, Murray Adaskin, André Previn and Malcolm Arnold.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Tuesday, January 14, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)

VIOLA CLASS RECITAL

Students from the studio of Joanna Hood perform works by

Bach, Brahms, Doheny, and Prokofiev.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Wednesday, January 22, 12:30 p.m. (Free admission)

LIEDER AT LUNCH: *Hollywood Elegies*

An exploration of the German Lied repertoire with Sharon and Harald Krebs.

The *Hollywood Elegies* of Hanns Eisler and Bertolt Brecht. Bring your lunch!

Rm. B037, MacLaurin Building B-Wing

Saturday, January 25, 2:30 p.m. (Admission by donation)

SAXOPHONE CLASS RECITAL

Students from the studio of Wendell Clanton.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Saturday, January 25, 8:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)

VOICE SHOWCASE

Students from the studios of Benjamin Butterfield, Susan Young and Anne Grimm.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Sunday, January 26, 1:00 p.m. (Admission by donation)

CLARINET CLASS RECITAL

Students from the studio of Patrician Kostek.

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall

Tickets available at the UVic Ticket Centre (250-721-8480),
online (www.tickets.uvic.ca) and at the door.

To receive our *On the Pulse* brochure and
newsletter by email, contact: concert@uvic.ca



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