

## Symphony No. 4 in G major

GUSTAV MAHLER

B. July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia

D. May 18, 1911, Vienna

*Premiered on November 25, 1901 by the Kaim Orchestra in Munich with the composer conducting.*

*Scored for two piccolos, four flutes, three oboes, English horn, five clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, timpani, percussion (bass drum, triangle, sleigh bells, glockenspiel, cymbals, tam-tam), harp, strings and solo soprano (approx. 60 minutes).*

Although it was widely disliked when it premiered around Europe, Symphony No. 4 is now generally regarded as one of the Mahler's more approachable symphonies. It is far lighter in tone and shorter in length than many of his others, and it contains colorful touches that he hoped would engage audiences after the monumental "Resurrection" Symphony (No. 2) and the weighty Third Symphony. The Fourth is the last of the three "Wunderhorn" symphonies, so-called because they are all based on texts drawn from "Des Knaben Wunderhorn" ("The Youth's Magic Horn"), a collection of German folk poems. Here, only the finale is texted; the solo soprano sings "Wir Geniessen die Himmlischen Freuden" ("We Enjoy Heaven's Delights").

Sleigh bells and woodwinds open the work in B minor, melting quickly into a simple, rustic G-major tune in the violins, an almost tongue-in-cheek parody of child-like naïveté. The strings and winds begin a dialogue during which they constantly interrupt each other, each trying to interject its own version of the first theme. With this passage, Mahler has introduced a device that will be employed throughout the symphony, quickly passing thematic material from one instrument family to another. Rarely does a single group of instruments finish an entire theme on its own; instead, the material is traded among the different color spectrums of the orchestra. This continues in the second theme, a more languid one that returns to the opening sleigh bells by way of a fragmented "rustic" theme that descends through the lowest ranks of the orchestra. The restatement of the opening material presents another important idea, a plaintive, yodel-like motif played first in the cellos and then passed through the woodwinds. The development begins with the sleigh bells once again followed by pieces of the first two themes brought together by rich counterpoint and colored by brief solos for violin, horn, clarinet and muted trumpet. The movement's climax, signaled with crashing cymbals and ringing triangle, anticipates the "Wunderhorn" song in the finale.

The second movement alternates three statements of a scherzo with two trios. An unsettling effect results from the opening solo violin which is tuned up a whole tone and asked to play like a rustic fiddle. The move to a major key brings about a brief moment of calm, but the grotesque waltz heard at the outset returns once more before the horns signal the beginning of the trio. The trio is also a waltz, in this case reminiscent of the Austrian countryside, with distant horn calls and graceful glissandi in the violins.

The beautiful adagio begins in the low strings, gradually adding the second violins and then the first violins and the oboe. What follows is essentially a set of variations that slowly

unfurl, their development interrupted twice by minor-mode lament. The beginning of the movement, so serene and deliberate, does not foresee the outpouring of drama that unfolds later as intimate chamber-like passages give way to fuller, brighter orchestration. A brief return to the calm of the movement's opening is interrupted by the brass, playing a theme in E major that was encountered in both of the previous movements and will be sung by the soloist in the finale. The extremes of this movement give the impression of a conflict in progress; it is a deeper tranquility that wins out, but with a sense of having been transformed by the exuberant outbursts that preceded it.

A version of the finale was composed as an independent piece several years before Mahler even began the rest of the symphony. So although much of the material is recognizable from earlier movements, in this sense the finale is not so much a "summing up" of the previous movements as it is their point of genesis. The music vividly illustrates much of the text, a child's dream-like picture of heaven. Chorale-like segments, each followed by a pause and then a sleigh bell entrance, are poignant moments of introspection standing amid a general sense of ebullience.

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*Program note by Amy Kimura, a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance.*