

Oslo Philharmonic/Klaus Mäkelä with Lise Davidsen

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 9.30pm, including a 20-minute interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

Gustav Mahler 'Adagio' from Symphony No 10

Alban Berg *Seven Early Songs*

1. Nacht (Night)
2. Schilflied (Reed song)
3. Die Nachtigall (The nightingale)
4. Traumgekrönt (Crowned with dreams)
5. Im Zimmer (In the room)
6. Liebesode (Ode to love)
7. Sommertage (Summer days)

Jean Sibelius Symphony No 5

1. Tempo molto moderato
2. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto
3. Allegro molto

Jessica Duchon explores the music that marks the Oslo Philharmonic's first live London performance under the baton of Klaus Mäkelä.

Beethoven, Schubert, Bruckner and Dvorák each left no more than nine symphonies. In this light, Gustav Mahler's superstition about reaching this number himself is understandable. It also proved prophetic. His Symphony No 9 was indeed the last he completed; the surviving Adagio from his intended Symphony No 10 remains a tantalising glimpse of a future unfulfilled.

This music is deeply personal, associated with the crisis Mahler suffered in 1910 on learning of his wife Alma's affair with the architect Walter Gropius. It led him to consult Sigmund Freud, who later wrote of their 'highly interesting expeditions through [Mahler's] life history'; but alongside psychoanalysis, the composer began a new symphony, annotating its manuscript with verbal outbursts about Alma: 'Madness, seize me, the accursed! Negate me, so I forget that I exist, that I may cease to be!'; 'To live for you! To die for you!'; and a tender diminutive, 'Almschi'.

The Symphony No 10 was unfinished upon Mahler's death in 1911; 13 years later, Alma asked her daughter's husband, Ernst Krenek, to complete it from the sketches. His version of the Adagio and the Purgatorio (the third movement) was premiered that year, but it is the 1964 critical Mahler edition's Adagio that has survived long term.

The extended movement is warm-hearted yet tragic; the music builds through the interrogation of its ideas until a giant climax implodes in a vast outburst of anguish. The final pages can seem nothing less than the last breath of romanticism fading into the unknown.

Alban Berg enjoyed a privileged Viennese childhood, beginning to compose aged 16. Then, in quick succession, his father died, he failed his exams and a love affair collapsed. After a suicide attempt, he became an apprentice accountant in an Austrian government ministry.

On the side, he composed a copious quantity of songs, plus vocal ensembles which he sang with his brother and sister. In 1904, spotting a newspaper advert for composition lessons with Arnold Schoenberg, Berg's siblings showed their brother's manuscripts to the celebrated modernist, who agreed to teach him without a fee. His studies with Schoenberg continued for five years, but the two remained close friends and colleagues for the rest of Berg's short life.

barbican

In 1928 Berg chose seven of his songs (out of more than 100) for revision, orchestration and publication. The premiere on 6 November was the first formal hearing of pieces written some two decades earlier, although 'Die Nachtigall', 'Traumgekrönt' and 'Liebesode' had been performed in 1907 at a concert of works by Schoenberg's pupils.

Each sets a text by a different poet, but they share the emotional intensity and extended harmonic language that Berg inherited from influences such as Richard Strauss's *Salome* and Schoenberg's *Verklärte Nacht*.

The music is poised at the tipping point from which romanticism spilled over towards modernism. Berg responds with hypersensitive care to the poems, whether glancing back in time in 'Schilflied' (Nikolaus Lenau) and the Brahmsian 'Die Nachtigall' (Theodor Storm), tackling edgier eroticism in the first song, 'Nacht' (Carl Hauptmann) or creating a delicate, malleable fabric for 'Traumgekrönt' (Rainer Maria Rilke). The set tells us much about where Berg came from – and something, too, of where he would go next.

'Today at ten to eleven I saw 16 swans. One of my greatest experiences. Lord God, that beauty!' It was 21 April 1915; Jean Sibelius was working on the first draft of his Fifth Symphony. The flight of swans left its mark on the finale, a sonic realisation of the sense of wonder that nature inspired in Finland's greatest composer.

The Finnish government had commissioned the symphony in honour of Sibelius's 50th birthday; such was his national stature that it had been declared a holiday. On the appointed evening, the composer duly conducted the world premiere of its original version.

Nevertheless, this was not the end of the journey. It was six years before Sibelius was content with the symphony in its final form. World events were impacting heavily on him, as on everybody; World War I was raging through Europe and in 1917 Finland was fighting Russia, after declaring independence. The Sibelius family spent much of 1918 in Helsinki for safety, their house, Ainola, having been searched twice by Red Guard soldiers; but once they could return, the intensely self-critical composer revised the Fifth Symphony for the third time. He described the result as 'practically composed anew.'

The *Tempo molto moderato* builds up from fragmentary ideas, beginning with a horn-call motif and gradually extending and crystallising. The movement contrasts hinted ideas and a sense of harmonic instability with bolder, more strongly rooted statements and at one point makes a startling breakthrough as if from darkness into light, reflecting the combination of two movements in the original draft, including a scherzo, into one. Finally the ideas come together and find agreement, sweeping forward to a triumphant close.

In the *Andante mosso*, pizzicato strings and staccato flutes present a rhythmically distinctive theme while woodwind and horns offer a sustained counter-idea. A series of variants explore and experiment gently with these contrasts.

A rustle of tremolando builds anticipation as the finale begins, before the horns break into their moment of glory in the 'swan' theme; alongside it, a countermelody in woodwind and cellos soars forth, the music taking the sky with a striking switch of key. A slowing of pace in the final pages leads to a deceptively timed conclusion in six giant, affirmative chords.

Performers

Klaus Mäkelä conductor

Lise Davidsen soprano

Oslo Philharmonic

violin I

Elise Båtnes
Pauls Ezergailis
André Orvik
Eileen Siegel
Jørn Halbakken
Øyvind Fosshem
Alyson Read
Per Sæmund Bjørkum
Arve Moen Bergset
Bodumila Nystedt
Daniel Dalnoki
Guro Asheim
Brage Sæbø
Johannes Sciacco Schantz
Emilie Norum Gudim
Amanda Håøy Horn

violin II

Kjell Arne Jørgensen
Dagny Bakken
Vegard Johnsen
Svein Skretting
Arne Jørgen Øian
Niels Aschehoug
Marit Egenes
Ragnar Heyerdahl
Hans Morten Stensland
Baard Winther Andersen
Ingeborg Fimreite
Aslak Juva
Emil Huckle-Kleve
Mons Michael Thommesen

viola

Catherine Bullock
Henninge Landaas
Anders Rensvik
Birgitta Halbakken
Eirik Sørensen
Heidi Heistø Carlsen
Stig-Ove Ose
Cecilia Wilder
Arthur Bedouelle
Pål Solbakk
Øystein Torp
Ingvild Spilling

cello

Louisa Tuck
Katharina Hager-Saltnes
Bjørn Solum
Hans Josef Groh
Cecilia Götestam
Kari Ravnan
Johannes Martens
Ingvild Sandnes
Inga Byrkjeland
Sverre Kyvik Bauge

double bass

Kenneth Ryland
Marius Flatby
Kjetil Sandum
Frode Berg
Steinar Børner
Danijel Petrovic
Nicholas Chalk
Eskild Abelseth

flute

Ting-Wei Chen
Tom Ottar Andreassen
Helen Benson
Trond Magne Brekka

oboe

David Strunck
Takuya Takashima
Min Hua Chiu
Bryn Mir Williams

clarinet

Leif Arne Tangen Pedersen
Pierre Xhonneux
Ingvill Hafskjold

bassoon

Roman Reznik
Zeynep Hediye Ayaydinli
Frode Cato Carlsen
Linn Cecilie Ringstad

horn

Inger Besserudhagen
Maksim Semenov
Jan Olav Martinsen
Kjell Adel Lundstrøm
Marie Solum Gran
James Patterson

trumpet

Brynjar Kolbergstrud
Axel Sjøstedt
Jonas Haltia
Odd Nilsen

trombone

Audun Breen
Terje Midtgård
Thorbjørn Lønmo
Anders Dalhaug

tuba

Frode Amundsen

timpani

Tom Vissgren

timpani & percussion

Christopher Lane

percussion

Christian Berg

harp

Birgitte Volan Håvik
Catherine Derrick

celeste

Gonzalo Moreno de Andres