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Colorado Mahlerfest Announces Its Thirty-Fifth Season
“What Mahler Tells Me”
May 17 to 22, 2022

Photos and graphics available at <https://bit.ly/mf35press>

Boulder, CO - Colorado Mahlerfest announces Mahlerfest XXXV, featuring Artistic Director Kenneth Woods conducting a new edition of Gustav Mahler's Third Symphony. Other highlights include the world premiere of Christopher Gunning's Tenth Symphony and the festival's first opera presentation, Bela Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*. In addition, festival-week events—some free—celebrate Mahler's work, life, inspirations, and legacy with two chamber concerts, a performance of film music, a full-day symposium, as well as masterclasses and social events.

The festival's climax event, the symphony concert on Sunday afternoon, May 22 at CU's Macky Auditorium, features soloist mezzo-soprano Stacey Rishoi joined by the Boulder Concert Chorale and Boulder Children's Chorale Festival Choir. Mahler was an avid hiker who felt a profound connection to nature, and composed the symphony during summers in the Alps between 1893 and 1896. The piece has explicit ties to nature, with evocatively named movements such as “What the Flowers in the Meadow Tell Me” and “What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me,” inspiration for this year's festival theme: “What Mahler Tells Me.” The concert opens with the world premiere of British composer Christopher Gunning's Tenth Symphony. Gunning is known for his film and television scores, including *La Vie en Rose* and the David Suchet *Poirot* series.

Enlarging on the festival theme, Maestro Woods explains, “We explore how Mahler's life and music fit into the culture of his time, how he was affected by what happened around him, and how his work affected others. We look at similarities or parallels that can be drawn with other composers, artists, and philosophers who worked at the same time, and we are always curious about his legacy in the 111 years since his death.”

Woods continues, “Composers in Mahler's generation were drinking very much from the same well as Mahler but produced music that sounded very different. It's hard to think of two composers whose music sounds less similar than Bartók and Mahler, but the more I've looked at them side-by-side, the more interesting parallels I've discovered. Thus we are very excited this year to finally achieve a goal we've pursued since I joined the festival, to do our first proper opera, Bartók's mega-masterpiece *Bluebeard's Castle*.”

The festival's opera presentation on Saturday evening, May 21—a chamber orchestra arrangement of *Bluebeard's Castle*—features soloists April Frederick in the role of Judith and Gustav Andreassen in the role of Bluebeard. It will be sung in Hungarian with English supertitles. As Woods explains, “the melodic language of the opera grows out of the rhythms of the language; this is lost if sung in translation.”

Preceding these performances, the festival opens with “Mahler at the Piano” on Tuesday afternoon, May 17. In Mahler's time, before the wide availability of sound recordings and playback, the main means of musical dissemination was piano. CU College of Music faculty David Korevaar and Jeremy Reger will play works by Mahler and Bruckner arranged for piano. Bruckner was a major figure in Mahler's life, the young Mahler's counterpoint teacher and a hero to Mahler in many ways. Woods says, of Mahler's transcription of Bruckner's Third Symphony, “It will be fascinating to hear what Mahler makes of his teacher's composition.” Also fascinating will be a recording of a piano roll made by Mahler, the only documentation we have of how his performances might have sounded.

More intersections and parallels with Mahler will be explored in “Quartets and More,” a chamber music concert on Thursday afternoon, May 19, featuring principal players from the MahlerFest orchestra performing works by Bartók, Beethoven, Casella, Crumb, and Gunning. Woods explains the connection with Beethoven: “Mahler had this incredible vision in his third symphony, depicting the world in all its natural splendor and danger, ending the symphony as if viewing Earth from afar and seeing the universe and its picture of all-embracing divine love. To express this, he used the melody from the slow movement of Beethoven's last string quartet. Thus, to end the chamber concert we will play that movement, one of the most sublime and personal things Beethoven ever wrote.”

The festival again offers a free program at the Huntington Bandshell in Boulder's Central Park, this year on Friday, May 20, 6pm. Mahlerfest Executive Director Ethan Hecht says, “We are able to perform an outdoor concert after popular acclaim from the festival's first appearance there last year. We thank our community of supporters who made this concert possible. It will enable us to draw even more connections between Mahler and pop culture today.”

“Mahler and the Movies” presents excerpts from scores by several composers influenced by Mahler. Woods elaborates: “Although much has been written about Mahler's influence on his contemporary Viennese composers, his reach was much broader, influencing a range of European composers, many who had to flee World War II and the Nazi era, including many who shaped musical instruction at American conservatories, who built great American orchestras such as those in Cleveland and Philadelphia, and those who gave us film music. Max Steiner is said to have invented the Hollywood film score with his music for *King Kong* in 1933. Steiner took private composition lessons from Mahler. Erich Wolfgang Korngold, whose violin concerto we've played at the festival, met Mahler when he was young. Franz Waxman modeled his music for the last scene of *Sunset Boulevard* as Norma Desmond descends the staircase of her decaying Hollywood mansion on *Dance of the Seven Veils* from Richard Strauss's *Salome*, an opera which Mahler conducted often.”

Rounding out the festival is its acclaimed free full-day (9am–4pm) symposium, Saturday, May 21. Maestro Woods will describe the challenges of interpreting Mahler's score for the Third Symphony. Soprano April Frederick, who sings Judith in *Bluebeard's Castle*, will discuss aspects of the opera's plot. Peter Franklin, author of several books on Mahler, will reveal what a sentimental trombone, a distant

posthorn, and “The Bird of the Night” tell us about the symphony. Music publisher Breitkopf and Härtel’s Nick Pfefferkorn will discuss the critical edition of the symphony, which enjoys its U.S. premiere at this festival. Musicologist Leah Batstone, who studies cultural intersections between the Vienna of Mahler’s time and 20th century Ukraine, will discuss Nietzsche and Mahler’s early symphonies.

Ethan Hecht notes, “This will be our first May festival in three years after pandemic adjustments of the last two seasons. We hope the music of Mahler, his contemporaries, and those connected to his legacy will bring some joy and inspiration in our challenging times.”

Find more information about the Mahlerfest program at <https://mahlerfest.org/mf35/>

Read more about Maestro Kenneth Woods at <https://mahlerfest.org/about-kenneth-woods-page/>

Colorado MahlerFest’s mission is to celebrate the legacy of composer Gustav Mahler through an annual festival featuring all of Mahler’s musical output as well as contextual cultural and educational events. The organization was founded in 1988 by Artistic Director Emeritus Robert Olson, who, after studying in Vienna on a Fulbright scholarship, recognized similarities between the beautiful Colorado landscape and Mahler’s summertime composing locations. The festival’s notable achievements include a 2000 Colorado State Senate proclamation that the festival enriches the lives of the Colorado public as well as receipt of the International Gustav Mahler Society of Vienna’s rare Gold Medal (the only American orchestra to receive this award other than Mahler’s own New York Philharmonic). Olson retired in 2015 and was succeeded by Kenneth Woods, an internationally active, American-born conductor, currently also Artistic Director of the English Symphony Orchestra. During Woods’s tenure, MahlerFest has shifted from almost entirely volunteer-based to a training-orchestra model with Festival Artists inspiring students of all ages.

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