



# The University of Georgia Symphony Orchestra

Thursday  
March 3 2016  
8:00 p.m.

conductor Mark Cedel  
assistant conductor Claudine Gamache

## PROGRAM

### **Mahler** Symphony No. 6 in A Minor, *Tragic*

Allegro energico, ma non troppo

Scherzo: Wachtig

Andante moderato

Finale: Allegro moderato

The Mahler Symphony No. 6 will be performed without intermission.

HODGSON CONCERT HALL

UGA Symphony Orchestra

## Program Notes

By Steven Ledbetter

**Gustav Mahler** (1860-1911)

Symphony No. 6 in A Minor, *Tragic*

*Gustav Mahler was born in Kalischt (Kalište) near the Moravian border of Bohemia on July 7, 1860, and died in Vienna on May 18, 1911. He began composing the Sixth Symphony during his summer vacation at Maiernigg in 1903 and finished the work the following summer. The first performance took place under Mahler's direction in Essen on May 27, 1906. The score calls for piccolo, four flutes (third and fourth doubling piccolo), four oboes and English horn (third and fourth oboes also doubling English horn), three clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, four bassoons, contrabassoon, eight horns, six trumpets, four trombones and tuba, timpani (two players), a large complement of percussion including glockenspiel, cowbells, deep bells, Rute (a brush of twigs struck upon a hard surface), wooden hammer, bass drum, side drum, triangle, cymbals, and tam-tam, xylophone, two harps, celesta, and strings. Approximate performance time is eighty-three minutes.*

In 1921, Paul Bekker, in the earliest really substantial study of Mahler's work, *Gustav Mahlers Sinfonien*, began the chapter on the Sixth Symphony by noting that at that time the trilogy of purely instrumental symphonies, Nos. 5, 6, and 7, were the works least frequently performed, and that, of these, the Sixth was the rarest of all. For many years the Sixth was the only Mahler symphony never to have been given in America. (Serge Koussevitzky intended to remedy that defect in 1933 but apparently was unable to make arrangements with the Leipzig publisher for the parts. It remained for Dimitri Mitropoulos to introduce the symphony to America in 1947, and by then the problems were different; the publisher's original parts had been destroyed in wartime bombings, so

new parts had to be copied from the score). Until relatively recently, when, true to the composer's own prediction, his time came (with a vengeance), these "middle" symphonies were still rarely heard.

Possibly part of the reason for the neglect of the middle symphonies was that audiences found it easier to follow Mahler's highly original approach to symphonic writing when provided with an explicit program (such as those he had produced for the First and Third symphonies before choosing to suppress them) or with a text (as in the Second, Third, Fourth, and Eighth). His dazzlingly complex and ingenious instrumental symphonies simply overwhelmed the senses, especially before the development of the long-playing record, when one had to catch them at infrequent performances. No composer has benefited so much from the development of the recording as Mahler, simply because listeners can now live with his demanding works until they begin to reveal their secrets.

We might have expected that the Sixth would be easier to comprehend than the others, if only because it is one of Mahler's rare productions to follow the traditional four-movement symphonic form, but the somber and emotional quality of the score seems to have acted against it. Although Mahler avoided revealing any kind of program for the three symphonies, he did allow the Sixth to be performed with the epithet *Tragic*; later he removed even that much of a hint. The mood is, in any event, self-evident, since it is the only Mahler symphony to end unrelievedly in the minor tonality. All the others, even when they start in the minor, proceed to blazing triumph or, at least, to gentle, poignant resignation, in the major mode. But though the fatalism of the ending (for Mahler was indeed a fatalist) may depress listeners who look instead for transfiguration, writers on Mahler increasingly rank the Sixth, taken as a whole, as his greatest symphonic achievement. The composer himself found the work almost too moving to bear and predicted (correctly, as

it turned out) that the Sixth would languish in obscurity until the world knew his first five symphonies.

We might very well wonder why Mahler wrote a “tragic” symphony in 1903 and 1904. As is usually the case with such queries, the answer is by no means simple; indeed, perhaps no explanation is possible. On the face of it, tragedy should have been the thing farthest from Mahler’s mind. He had married Alma Schindler, around whom his life henceforth revolved, on March 9, 1902, and their first daughter, Maria, was born in November. The year was one of increasing professional acclaim for Mahler the composer, with the enormously successful premiere of the Third Symphony in Krefeld in May. As a conductor he had already reached a pinnacle, having served as music director of the Vienna Opera since 1897. And he had begun composing with renewed vigor after his wedding, spending his summer vacations from the opera house engaged in feverish creative activity.

The Fifth Symphony, composed during the first summer after his wedding, is aptly characterized by Michael Kennedy as Mahler’s *Eroica*, a symphonic conquest. But the Sixth, which occupied the next two summers, is quite a different, filled with the heavy tread of marching, with dotted rhythms, and, above all, with a motto idea that consists simply of an A major triad that suddenly turns to minor. This major-to-minor motto functions on the smallest scale as a metaphor for the mood of the entire work, which several times in the last movement seems about to culminate in the major mode but finally shrinks from so positive a conclusion and ends tragically (but with defiance) in A minor.

We have a tendency, *ex post facto*, to think of Mahler as a death-obsessed neurotic, virtually incapable of living in the real world but rather pouring out his anguish, longing, and intimations of mortality in his work. To a considerable extent these views

derive from Alma’s memoirs, which are an indispensable source but must be used with extreme caution, since she had every reason to build up her own role in “sustaining” the composer through his tribulations. (A great deal of the Mahler legend and of our understanding of his music ultimately goes back to otherwise unsupported statements in Alma’s memoirs.) Until his heart lesion was discovered in 1907, Mahler maintained a vigorous summer regimen of swimming, hiking, and mountain climbing. Even Alma recalls that the two summers during which he composed the Sixth were emotionally untroubled. Of 1903, she said:

Summer had come, and with it we resumed our life at Maiernigg and its unvarying and peaceful routine. Mahler soon began working. This time it was the first sketches for the Sixth Symphony. He played a lot with our child, carrying her about and holding her up to dance and sing. So young and unencumbered he was in those days.

Of 1904, the summer in which Mahler finished the symphony, Alma noted only that it was “beautiful, serene, and happy.” (Their second daughter had been born that June.) Only one thing upset her (or so she remembered years later); in both summers Mahler set to music some poems by Friedrich Rückert dealing with the death of children.

I found this incomprehensible. I can understand setting such frightful words to music if one had no children, or had lost those one had. Moreover, Friedrich Rückert did not write these harrowing elegies solely out of his imagination: they were dictated by the cruelest loss of his whole life. What I cannot understand is bewailing the deaths of children, who were in the best of health and spirits, hardly an hour after having kissed and fondled them. I exclaimed at the time:

‘For heaven’s sake, don’t tempt Providence!’

The result, of course, was Mahler’s greatest song cycle, *Kindertotenlieder*, which was thus being conceived and composed at the same time as the Sixth Symphony.

Alma claimed similar foreboding upon hearing the completed symphony. On the day that Mahler finally announced the work to be finished, Alma rushed to get everything done in the house, then walked with him arm-in-arm to the little hut, where he played it through for her.

Not one of his works came so directly from his inmost heart as this. We both wept that day. The music and what it foretold touched us so deeply. The Sixth is the most completely personal of his works, and a prophetic one also. . . . On him too fell three blows of fate, and the last felled him. But at the time he was serene; he was conscious of the greatness of his work. He was a tree in full leaf and flower.

We may well believe that the two were overcome by the deep personal expressiveness of this music, but the reference to “what it foretold” is surely wisdom after the fact. The last movement contained, at three decisive points, a single powerful stroke with a hammer, the instrument being introduced into the score of the symphony solely for these three strokes. According to Alma, the composer described the movement, with its hammer strokes, as “the hero, on whom fall three blows of fate, the last of which fells him as a tree is felled.” With the hindsight of one writing her memoirs, Alma saw three “hammer strokes” that struck Mahler himself in the year 1907 (though her description of the events, which has been followed by most writers, telescopes the time span and gives the impression that the blows came directly one after the other): his resignation from the Vienna Opera in the face of

mounting opposition to his reforms (and the strong thread of anti-Semitism in the city’s cultural life), the sudden and devastating death of his elder daughter Maria, at age four-and-a-half, from scarlet fever and diphtheria, and the discovery of his own serious heart condition – the blow that “felled him.” Still, though Alma and Mahler may not have reacted with foreboding when she first heard the music, the composer after 1907 came to be superstitiously afraid of the three hammer strokes, and eventually removed the last, “mortal” blow. As the score is printed in the critical edition of Mahler’s works, there are only two such strokes, though many conductors choose to reinstate the missing one. This evening, at the moment in the score where Mahler originally placed the third hammer blow, the hammer will be raised symbolically, but not struck.

The hammer blows presented a problem at the first performance. During the rehearsals it was discovered that they could not be heard to proper effect. The Dutch conductor Willem Mengelberg wrote to the composer with a suggested solution, for which Mahler thanked him in a letter promising to try it when he conducted the symphony in Amsterdam and planning perhaps to add a note to the score by way of explanation. Unfortunately Mahler never did conduct the Sixth in Amsterdam, Mengelberg’s letter to him is lost (so we do not know what the suggestion was), and the composer never changed the explanation in the score, which states simply that the hammer blow should be a “short, strong, but dully reverberating stroke of a non-metallic character (like an axe-stroke).” Thus the problem of creating the appropriate sound is left, in each case, to the performers.

Alma’s memoirs recall the emotions aroused in the composer as he prepared the orchestra for the first performance of the Sixth, to be held at a festival of the United German Music Society in Essen:

We came to the last rehearsals, to the dress rehearsal – to the last

movement with its three great blows of fate. When it was over, Mahler walked up and down in the artists' room, sobbing, wringing his hands, unable to control himself. Fried, Gabrilovitch, Butts, and I stood transfixed, not daring to look at one another.

Apparently one result of Mahler's highly wrought-up reaction to the dress rehearsal was that he did not conduct the premiere itself well, fearing to underline the significance of the last movement. The response of the critics was not especially favorable, with complaints in general that Mahler's undeniable brilliance of orchestral technique had outstripped the content of his work. But two young men with highly educated musical ears were entranced and excited, and they remained devotees of Mahler's music. Their names were Anton Webern and Alban Berg.

One reason for their enthusiasm is that here Mahler achieves his most successful balance between the claims of dramatic self-expression, which is always at the core of his music, and architectural formality. It is, in fact, one of the most striking things about the Sixth that it is at once deeply personal and classically formal. Three of the four movements are in the tonic key of A minor, the only exception being the slow movement (a symphonic tradition going all the way back to Haydn, though rarely maintained at the end of the nineteenth century).

The sinister opening bars introduce the constantly recurring motives of the steady tramping in the bass and a dotted rhythm. The formal exposition (which is repeated, as in earlier classical symphonies) adds to these motives a melody opening with a downward octave leap and more marching, leading to the first explicit statement of the "motto." Orchestral timbre plays as important a part as the change from major to minor in coloring this idea: three trumpets attack the A-major chord *fortissimo* but die away to *pianissimo* as it turns to A

minor; three oboes, entering on the same chord, grow from *pianissimo* to *fortissimo*, so that the heroic brassy sound of the major chord gradually shifts to the expressive nasality of the double reeds. A chorale-like theme in the woodwinds, punctuated by light pizzicato strings, leads to F major and the passionate second theme (which, again according to Alma, was the composer's attempt to depict her), soaring in the violins and upper woodwinds.

Among the most poetic passages in the development is the surprising appearance of cowbells playing against soft chords in the celesta and high, triple-*piano* tremolo chords in the violins. Mahler, the ardent alpinist, had no doubt heard the sound of cowbells many times echoing up to him through the clear mountain air; he considered them "the last earthly sounds heard from the valley far below by the departing spirit on the mountain top." But in the score he adds a careful footnote that "the cowbells must be handled very discreetly – in realistic imitation of a grazing herd, high and low-pitched bells resounding from the distance, now all together, now individually." It is, however, expressly noted, that this technical remark is not intended to provide a programmatic explanation. The first movement ends with the "Alma" theme in a temporarily consoling A major.

The middle two movements raise special problems. Mahler originally placed them in the order Scherzo-Andante. Later on, he was persuaded that the thematic material of the scherzo was too similar to that of the first movement, and that the order of the middle movements should be reversed for greater variety. The symphony was originally published with the score in that revised sequence. But Mahler himself was not permanently convinced, and apparently he changed his mind on this point repeatedly (sometimes even in the middle of a rehearsal). The present performance will use the order that was Mahler's original – and possibly final – choice.

The scherzo opens with an explicit reminiscence of the tramping bass of the opening movement, and follows it with recollections of other material, now occasionally in a parodistic mode (especially the sarcastic trills of the woodwinds). The Trio, marked "*Altväterisch*" ("in an old-fashioned style"), features the oboe in a charming passage written in irregular rhythms. According to Alma's memoirs, this section "represented the arhythmic games of the two little children, tottering in zigzags over the sand." Here again she found the ending to be ominous and foreboding, dying away enigmatically, as it does, into A minor and silence.

The Andante moderato, in E-flat major, provides the one real passage of consolation in the symphony (significantly, this occurs in the key that is farthest away from A minor), though the melodic material is akin to that of one of the *Kindertotenlieder*.

The slow movement ends softly and lyrically in E flat; the finale begins in the relative minor of that key, C minor – one of Mahler's favorite expressive tonal relationships. A soaring violin theme, beginning with a rising octave, mirrors the falling octave of the first-movement theme. In this finale, Mahler establishes on an imposing scale

a contrapuntal texture bringing together elements from throughout the symphony, especially the first movement. A development section builds toward a massive climax in D major, but just at the point of arrival the first hammer blow breaks off the cadence and the major shifts suddenly to minor for a new and still more urgent development. Building to a passage of pure, almost Palestrinian counterpoint in A, the climactic cadence to D is once again interrupted by the hammer stroke and a deceptive cadence onto B-flat. Another return to the introduction builds a climax in A major, which bids fair to hold to the triumphant conclusion of the symphony; this is the point where the third and final hammer stroke is called for (even if it is omitted from a performance, as it is from the critical edition, the point is marked by the thunderous return of the marching timpani figure from the opening movement), following which the only response is a complete collapse, as the brass and woodwinds sound once more the A minor triad – the conclusion of the motto figure – while the heavy timpani march dies away in sullen silence to a soft pizzicato A in the strings.

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### THE UGA SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND THE MAHLER SYMPHONIES

This evening marks the seventh performance of a Mahler symphony by the UGA Symphony Orchestra. Conductor Mark Cedel's notes on those concerts include some "tidbits" beyond the music itself.

#### Symphony No. 1

September 20, 2001

The performance was originally scheduled for September 13.

#### Symphony No. 6

February 9, 2006

A cell phone rang and interrupted the last three minutes of the performance.

#### Symphony No. 2

April 5, 2007

Also called the "Resurrection" Symphony, the performance was on Maundy Thursday.

#### Symphony No. 5

March 4, 2010

The performance came the day after an ice storm, and the orchestra had no dress rehearsal in Hodgson Hall.

#### Symphony No. 4

September 9, 2010

#### Symphony No. 1

February 17, 2011

# The University of Georgia Symphony Orchestra

**conductor** Mark Cedel  
**assistant conductor** Claudine Gamache

## VIOLIN I

Lucas Scalamogna  
*Concertmaster*  
 Moises Cunha  
 Teresa Grynia  
 Minhye Park  
 Rogério Nunes  
 Yeasol Kang  
 Serena Scibelli  
 Pedro Miszewski  
 Julie Saxton  
 Lourenco de Nardin  
 Budó  
 Daniel Allen  
 Carly Joy King  
 Paloma Rossatto

## VIOLIN II

Laurel Haislip  
*Principal*  
 Sahada Buckley  
 Nicole Valerioti  
 Ian Ying Chen Chen  
 Sydney Doemel  
 Monica Corliss  
 Annie Leeth  
 Rachel Matthews  
 Caroline Strevel  
 Alex Butenko  
 Kellie Shaw  
 Rebecca Huang  
 Rachel Usher

## VIOLA

Chris Williams  
*Principal*  
 Nicholas Lindell  
 John Cooper  
 Ally Brady

Sean Askin  
 Victor Wu  
 Meagan O'Mara

## CELLO

Laurel Pistey  
*Principal*  
 Noah Johnson  
 Alina Vázquez  
 Ana Cristina Abrantes  
 Jessica Osbrink  
 Conner Hart  
 Jake Hood  
 Sujay Sreenivasan  
 Ian Connolly

## BASS

Cláudia Amaral  
*Principal*  
 Leonard Ligon  
 Mattia Beccari  
 Jonathan McWilliams  
 Kevin Shelton  
 Jeffrey Mann  
 Quentin Smith  
 Ian Brown

## FLUTE

Emily Zirlin  
*Principal*  
 Sarah Balch  
 Brianna Slone  
 Emily Cho  
 Clare Nunley

## OBOE

William Jones  
*Principal*  
 Lizzy Evernham

Marah Stefanisko  
 Cassidy Brown  
 Holly Behre

## CLARINET

Greg Hamilton  
*Principal*  
 Dylan Horne  
 Jake Senter  
 Pedro Alliprandini  
 Mateus Falkemback

## BASSOON

Darby Woodling  
*Principal*  
 Matthew Huff  
 Jennifer Grubbs  
 Carlee Woodring  
 Nikolos Bacote

## HORN

Andrew Sehmann  
*Co-Principal*  
 Anna Carter  
*assistant*  
 Meredith Boyd  
 Addison Whitney  
 Peter Riggs  
 Stefan Williams  
 Duncan Robertson  
 Nikki Perez  
 Brooke Cable

## TRUMPET

Anderson Romero  
*Principal*  
 Dan Price  
 Victoria Bethel  
 Cody Beard

Yanbin Chen  
 Tyler Jones

## TROMBONE

Matt Norman  
*Principal*  
 Duncan Lord  
 Keaton Jacobs  
 Aaron Baldwin, bass

## TUBA

Clare Brennan

## HARP

Katie O'Shaughnessy  
 Madison Miller

## KEYBOARD

Emma Lin

## PERCUSSION

Wesley Sumptor  
*Principal*  
 Savanna Lawing  
 Keller Steinson  
 Nick Martinez  
 Hunter McGee  
 Bonnie Haupt

## LIBRARIAN

Ana Christina Abrantes

## PERSONNEL

Laurel Pistey

## PRODUCTION

Dan Price  
 Tim Morris

# For the Fans of the PAC

## Conducting Business at UGA.

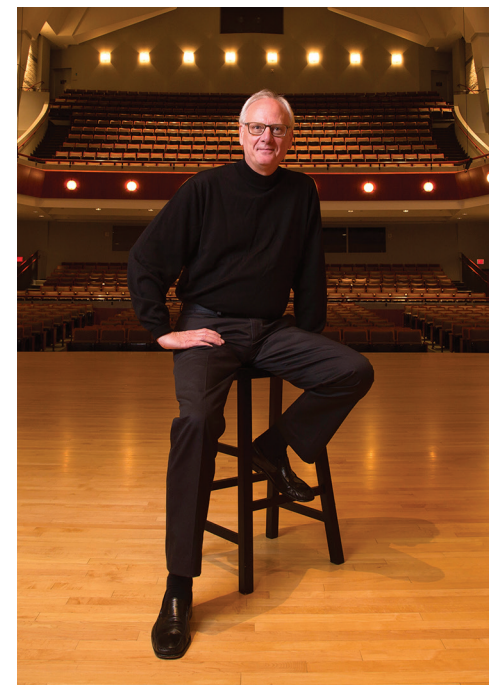
### Mark Cedel

If I had to sum up in one word what Hodgson Hall means to me, it would have to be distinction. I can think of three distinctions that nobody else can claim. Curious?

The first was the first. That is, I conducted the very first concert in Hodgson. Although the PAC official opening was not until April of 1996, Hodgson was named and opened in November, 1995. I remember vividly the first time the UGA Symphony Orchestra and I were on stage. We tried a few different setups, how we positioned ourselves on the stage, while still rehearsing our music. After about an hour, at one point we were all slack-jawed. It was during the slow movement of Shostakovich 9. The solo clarinet seemed to drift effortlessly into every corner of the hall with the low string pizzicatos, clear and distinct. We knew we were in a special place. A great stage that has warm resonance and clarity and articulation. It's very rare to find both in the same hall!

From that very first concert comes the second distinction. By my calculations, this month will mark my 177th performance in Hodgson Hall, all with the UGASO. There were two other times I performed, but not with the UGASO. Both were as a violist. There was an evening of chamber music by Brahms along with my fellow faculty members and some of our students. Then there was also a concert I played subbing with the Atlanta Symphony. I played the first half and then suddenly got quite ill during intermission and missed the second half. So that would bring the total to 179.5?

The third distinction, you can judge for yourself. Confidently, I can claim I am the only conductor in the history of music who has conducted



a concerto for banjo and orchestra and has stabbed himself with his own baton. Both happened on Hodgson stage, but not at the same time.

You, the audience also appreciate this great hall. But what you might not realize, Hodgson Hall is also a very important classroom. It is a place where our students learn about music and performance. How could we ever count all the students who have "learned" on this stage during the last twenty years?

That is the most remarkable distinction of all!

*Mark Cedel is Director of Orchestral Activities at the Hugh Hodgson School of Music.*



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