

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH
and
NATCHEZ FESTIVAL OF MUSIC
Present



Das Lied von der Erde
(*The Song of the Earth*)

Jay Dean, conductor
Jonathan Yarrington, tenor
Myka Murphy, alto
Jerry Morgan, speaker
The Festival Chamber Players

7 P.M., THURSDAY, MAY 16, 2024

TRINITY EPISCOPAL CHURCH
305 SOUTH COMMERCE STREET
NATCHEZ, MISSISSIPPI

Das Lied von Der Erde *(The Song of the Earth)*

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

From *Die Chinesisch Flöte*
Poems from the Tang-dynasty

Poets

Li Bai (701-762)
Qian Qi (710-782)
Mong Kao Yen (689/691-740)
and Wang Wei (698-761)

Translated into German by Hans Bethge (1876-1946)

- I. Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde: The drinking song about the misery of the earth
(Poem by Li Bai)
- II. Die Einsame im Herbst: The Lonely One in Autumn.
(Poem by Qian Qi)
- III. Von der Jugend: Youth
(Poem by Li Bai)
- IV. Von der Schönheit: Beauty
(Poem by Li Bai)
- V. Der Trunkene der Frühling: The Drunken Man at Springtime
(Poem by Li Bai)
- VI. Der Abschied: The Farewell
(Poems by Mong Kao Yen and Wang Wei with lines added by Mahler)

Jay Dean, Conductor
Jonathan Yarrington, Tenor
Myka Murphy, Alto
Jerry Morgan, Speaker

Marta Szlubowska, First Violin
Zully Morales, Second Violin
Ausra Jasineviciute, Viola
Veronica Parrales, Cello
David Pellow, Bass

Rachel Ciraldo, Flute
Stuart Breczinski, Oboe/English Horn
Kenneth Graves, Clarinets
Nanci Belmont, Bassoon
Mimi Linehan, Horn
Theresa Sanchez, Piano
Tyler Kemp, Keyboard
Andrew Hunkler, Percussion
Jason Mathena, Percussion
Andrew Gilstrap, Percussion

PROGRAM NOTES

Das Lied von der Erde (*The Song of the Earth*)

In 1907 Gustav Mahler seemed to be at the height of his game. The massive Symphony No. 8 (“Symphony of a Thousand”) had been a popular and critical success, the greatest he had ever experienced. He was eager to return to composition. Then disaster struck. He learned that his beloved daughter had died of scarlet fever; vicious antisemitism forced his early retirement as director of the Vienna Opera; his interim appointment at the Metropolitan Opera in America had not gone to his satisfaction; and his doctors had diagnosed the heart failure that would eventually kill him. Perhaps worst of all, he learned that the adulterous rumors about his beloved wife, Alma Schindler Mahler, were true. It was like a Greek tragedy come to life, yet somehow he persevered, leaving two more great works. Fearing to breach the legacy of Beethoven’s nine symphonies (throughout his life Mahler was superstitious), he settled upon a large-scale song cycle to take its place. Eventually, of course, there would be a true ninth symphony, and even fragments of a tenth. *Das Lied von der Erde*, though, satisfied him for now as a work embodying the best of both traditions, vocal and orchestral. Mahler died in 1911, not having heard this composition.

He chose as his text a compilation of Chinese poems published in German translation under the title *The Chinese Flute* by Hans Bethke. This anthology contained 83 poems of which Mahler chose seven. He freely adapted what he had found, even writing some of the verses himself as he had done ten years earlier in the *Symphony No. 2*. The best were four poems (movements 2-5) by the eighth century Chinese classical poet Li-Tai Po. His oriental subject was au courant in the second half of the nineteenth century—one need look no further than Gilbert and Sullivan to see this legacy. Fifteen years later Puccini would polish off the trend with his final opera, *Turandot*. Mahler poured himself into the work. As he wrote to his friend and first great conductor, Bruno Walter, “I think it is probably the most personal I have created so far.” The chosen texts play upon one of the composer’s major themes, the nature of a transitory life in an eternal creation. The completed work evinces essential characteristics of Mahler’s late musical style (Theodor Adorno): (1) the employment of simple themes with complex variations developed from them; (2) the influence of chamber music upon a large orchestral composition, often soft-spoken; (3) a final apotheosis for each work, usually in a lengthy adagio. (Mahler was very good at adagios; witness the massive yet firmly controlled finales of *Das Lied von der Erde* and *Symphonies 3 and 9*.) The order of the poems is Mahler’s own, moving from a celebration of the lushness of the earth, through nostalgia at its passing, and ending with the ultimate demise of the observer. There is no joy here, only acceptance.

Das Lied von der Erde is written for a massive orchestra approaching Wagnerian strength. (Sir Thomas Beecham used to say about his audience that they hated music “but love the noise it makes.”) The composition is thus expensive to perform, and from time to time a chamber music ensemble substitutes for the orchestra. Arnold Schoenberg’s arrangement for fourteen instruments is probably the best, and certainly the most performed. The soloists are a tenor and a mezzo-soprano, though a tenor and a baritone are sometimes used. The former is deserving of our sympathy, as the part is high in the stave and at the same time must soar over the voluble ensemble behind him. The work begins abruptly with no orchestral introduction, leaving the tenor alone and unsheltered in the rather shrill *Das Trinklied von Jammer der Erde*, “the drinking song about the misery of the earth.” A rather more elegant *Der Einsame im Herbst*, “the lonely one in autumn,” features gentle figures suggestive of a dance. *Von der Jugend*, “youth” is a pastoral scene of loneliness at court. It is both beautiful and bleak at the same time. *Von der Schönheit*, “beauty,” describes young men frolicking on a riverbank. *Der Trunkene der Frühling*, “the drunken man at springtime,” returns to our inebriated friend of the opening movement. While stumbling about he sees a beautiful bird but pours himself another drink and gets on with the business of the day. The sixth movement is the very great adagio that concludes the work. The text is a combination of two poems that Mahler brought together. It takes a half hour to perform, or about half the entire work and is as long as the previous movements combined. It is Mahler’s sublime farewell to the world and is one of his supreme compositions. It ends in a whisper of submission without rancor, “Ewig, ewig,” “for eternity, for eternity.” Alma Mahler said that his own last words were “Mozart, Mozart.” To him they meant the same.



ABOUT GUSTAV MAHLER

Gustav Mahler, born on July 7, 1860, in Kalischt, Bohemia (now part of the Czech Republic), was a renowned late-Romantic composer and conductor. He is widely regarded as one of the most important symphonic composers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Mahler's music is known for its emotional depth, innovative orchestration, and expansive structures. His compositions often explore profound themes of life, death, love, and nature, reflecting his own introspective and philosophical nature.

Mahler began his career as a conductor, holding prestigious positions at the Vienna Court Opera, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, and the New York Philharmonic. As a conductor, he was known for his meticulous attention to detail and his intense interpretations of works by composers such as Beethoven, Wagner, and Mozart.

As a composer, Mahler is best known for his symphonies, which are vast and complex works that push the boundaries of the traditional symphonic form. His symphonies often incorporate elements of folk music, popular songs, and references to nature, creating a rich tapestry of sound that is both deeply personal and universally resonant.

Despite facing personal tragedies and professional challenges throughout his life, Gustav Mahler's legacy endures through his timeless music, which continues to captivate and inspire audiences around the world.

Having never had the opportunity to hear *Das Lied von der Erde*, Gustav Mahler died on May 18, 1911, in Vienna, Austria.



ABOUT THE CONDUCTOR

Jay Dean, Conductor

Jay Dean is the Artistic Director of Opera Mississippi and the Natchez Festival of Music. He is also the Founding Artistic Director of FestivalSouth. He came to The University of Southern Mississippi in 1988 and was the Director of Orchestral Activities for the USM Symphony Orchestra for thirty years (1988-2018). Under his leadership the orchestra became known for "Bringing the World to Mississippi." At USM he also served as the Director of the School of Music, and the Associate Dean for Arts and External Relations in the College of Arts and Sciences. He continues to work at Southern Miss as the Executive Director of the Arts Institute of Mississippi and the founder of the Ambassador Concert Series on the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

The artistic programs that he has directed at Southern Miss and throughout the state are projects that have enhanced the lives of citizens throughout Mississippi. He has received the Governor's Award for Leadership in the Arts, the Excellence for Global Arts and Culture award from the Mississippi World Trade Center. He has also been inducted into the USM Alumni Hall of Fame and is a recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Southern Mississippi Research Council. In 2017, he and Opera Mississippi received the Governor's Award for Artistic Excellence, and in 2018 he was honored by the Mississippi State Legislature for his artistic work in Mississippi.

ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Jonathan Yarrington, Tenor

A native of Idaho Falls, Idaho, tenor Jonathan Yarrington is Associate Professor of Voice and Director of Opera at the University of Southern Mississippi. Prior to joining the faculty at USM, Dr. Yarrington was a member of The Dallas Opera Studio for three years. An active recitalist and concert performer, he has commissioned and performed new music for tenor and oboe, and specializes in the areas of German and Czech art song. Dr. Yarrington holds the Doctor of Musical Arts in Vocal Performance from The University of North Texas, where he studied with Dr. Stephen F. Austin.

Myka Murphy, Alto

Hailing from Atlanta, GA, Myka Murphy is a mezzo-soprano, who has been described as “a (vocal) powerhouse...with an abundant quality of strength” (OperaWire). Ms. Murphy is thrilled to be performing as the Alto Soloist in Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* with Natchez Music Festival and Festival South, and being a part of the world premiere of *Waiting Rooms* in Sacramento by friend and fellow Juilliard Alumni, Trey Makler. Most recently, she performed as Venus in Wagner’s *Tannhäuser* with Atlanta Concert Opera and the Alto soloist in the *Messiah* with Calvin University. Past performance highlights include: her return to Opera Mississippi to perform in their double bill of Menotti’s *the Medium* as Madame Flora and Puccini’s *Gianni Schicchi* as Zita, her Jackson Symphony debut as the mezzo soloist for Beethoven’s 9th Symphony and portraying Sorceress in the Juilliard School’s production of *Dido and Aeneas* with Juilliard’s Historical Performance ensemble—Juilliard 415, which traveled to London’s Holland Park and Versailles Opéra Royal. Ms. Murphy has a Masters of Music degree in Voice from The Juilliard School and a Bachelors of Music degree from the University of Southern Mississippi. She has completed the certificate program at the Opera Institute at Boston University. She is currently managed by Martha Wade of Wade Artist Management.

Jerry Morgan, Speaker

Jerry Morgan, a Mississippi native residing in Brandon, holds a Bachelor of Music Education in Vocal Music from Mississippi State University, a Master of Church Music from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and an Education Specialist degree in School Administration from Jackson State University. A U.S. Air Force veteran from the Vietnam era, he retired as a teacher in Mississippi public schools, teaching music from K-12. With extensive experience as a Music Minister in Southern Baptist churches in Mississippi, Texas, and Florida, Mr. Morgan remains active in choral music, performing with groups like The Mississippi Chorus Grande Chorus and Master Chorale, the Mississippi Baptist Singing Churchmen, and the Opera Mississippi Chorus. He also serves on the boards of The Mississippi Chorus and the Mississippi Boychoir. A valued member of Brandon Baptist Church, Mr. Morgan plays a crucial role in church music leadership.

The Festival Chamber Players

Das Lied von der Erde, one of Gustav Mahler’s last two completed symphonic works, is an extremely sophisticated musical work that requires an ensemble of extraordinary performers. Originally written for an orchestra of approximately 80 to 100 musicians, this chamber version by Arnold Schoenberg has been reduced to only 15 instrumental performers, which creates an exceptional level of artistic intensity for the ensemble. The Festival Chamber Players is comprised of some of the most outstanding musicians in the region. Hailing from world-renowned orchestras, top tier academic institutions, and internationally traveling professional chamber ensembles, these musicians will assemble to present a rare opportunity to experience one of Mahler’s final masterpieces.



ABOUT THE VISUAL ARTIST

Will Smith, Jr.

Will Smith, Jr., hails from a lineage rich in artistic heritage in New Orleans and the South. His great-great-grandfather, Robert Rawes, a renowned artist/sculptor, was born in England in 1821 before making his mark in New Orleans and Natchez, earning recognition as the foremost antebellum marble worker in the South. Meanwhile, his great-grand-uncle, Erasmus Humbrecht, born in Alsace-Lorraine in 1849, left his artistic legacy in New Orleans through fresco murals at St. Louis Cathedral and numerous religious paintings along the Mississippi River Road.

Originally from Natchez, Mississippi, Will's artistic journey began at the McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, exploring architecture and theater design. Pursuing a BFA in painting and sculpture at Birmingham-Southern College, he continued honing his craft in the South and at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Will furthered his studies in art therapy at Notre Dame de Namur University in California after stints in Atlanta and San Francisco.

A versatile artist, Will has undertaken diverse projects, from sculpting to set design, including commissions for Mardi Gras krewes in New Orleans. His passion for environmental activism shines through his artwork, notably in his exhibition "Today's Specials, The Journey of Louisiana Seafood, from Camp to Counter," which shed light on the impact of the BP Oil Spill on Louisiana's ecosystem and economy. Will's dedication to preserving the region's cultural heritage is evident in his depictions of disappearing landmarks like the fishing camps in the Louisiana wetlands.



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by Gustav Mahler

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