

MAHLERFEST 37

MAHLER & THE MOUNTAINS



RICHARD STRAUSS: *EINE ALPENSINFONIE* (AN ALPINE SYMPHONY), OP. 64

THE COLORADO MAHLERFEST ORCHESTRA
KENNETH WOODS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

RECORDED LIVE IN MAY 2024



COLORADO MAHLERFEST ORCHESTRA
KENNETH WOODS, *CONDUCTOR*

Richard Strauss: An Alpine Symphony, Op. 64

1. Nacht (Night) 02:34
2. Sonnenaufgang (Sunrise) 01:22
3. Der Anstieg (The Ascent) 02:14
4. Eintritt in den Wald (Entry into the Forest) 05:00
5. Allmählich noch lebhafter (Gradually More Lively) 00:14
6. Am Wasserfall (At the Waterfall) 00:57
7. Auf blumige Wiessen (On Flowering Meadows) 00:55
8. Auf der Alm (On the Alpine Pasture) 01:48
9. Schnell (Fast) 00:32
10. Durch Dickicht und Gestrüpp auf Irrwegen (Through Thickets and Undergrowth on the Wrong Path) 01:25
11. Auf dem Gletscher (On the Glacier) 01:15
12. Gefährliche Augenblicke (Dangerous Moments) 01:26
13. Auf dem Gipfel (On the Summit) 05:07
14. Vision (Vision) 03:34
15. Nebel steigen auf (Mists Rise) 00:25
16. Die Sonne verdüstert sich allmählich (The Sun Gradually Becomes Obscured) 01:00
17. Elegie (Elegy) 02:05
18. Stille vor dem Sturm (Calm before the Storm) 02:47
19. Gewitter und Sturm, Abstieg (Thunderstorm and Tempest, Descent) 03:45
20. Sonnenuntergang (Sunset) 02:59
21. Ausklang (Quiet Settles / Epilogue) 06:18
22. Nacht (Night) 02:01

Richard Strauss: An Alpine Symphony

By Kelly Dean Hansen, Ph.D.

Richard Strauss's *An Alpine Symphony* is many things. It was the first piece of music ever pressed to compact disc, in 1982. It is possibly the longest piece of continuous music—with no movement breaks—in the standard orchestral repertoire. Its instrumentation is as massive as anything in Mahler, including the Eighth Symphony. It is unabashedly pure program music, something else Mahler never really wrote. And it is surprisingly “classical” in form, as it can be analyzed using sonata form with tonal unity.

Whether it is really a “symphony” or a gargantuan tone poem is not a very interesting question. It is and can be both. Though its origins can be traced in earlier draft ideas going back to 1899 (including a four-movement piece called *The Alps*), it was in fact the death of Gustav Mahler in 1911 that inspired Strauss to work out those ideas. He then planned a two-movement work called *The Antichrist: An Alpine Symphony* with reference to Friedrich Nietzsche. After abandoning this idea, Strauss composed the work “just as a cow gives milk,” according to his own account upon restarting it in earnest in 1914, and he finished it quickly, along with its tremendous orchestration, by February 1915. It premiered in Dresden on October 28 of that year, and Strauss, with typical muted enthusiasm, said that “it really is quite a good piece!”

The result was a 50-minute work with more programmatic subtitles (22) than he had assigned in any of his earlier tone poems. Some of these “sections” are very brief, less than a minute, while others are as long as six minutes, but the program itself is clear: a portrait of a full day, before daybreak to nightfall, spent climbing a mountain, with diverse and varied views of the journey.

The pre-dawn to post-dusk time frame allows Strauss to begin and end with the same “night” music and to create a sort of mirror form that achieves classical unity. Themes recur in various sections, and the recapitulation of the putative sonata form is the thunderstorm that accompanies the descent, during which themes from other sections quickly appear in reverse order.

Strauss's orchestra uses quadruple woodwinds, eight horns, quadruple trombones and trumpets, an enormous percussion battery, both celesta and organ, two harps, and a component of strings capable

of intricate division. Some instruments never seen in a Mahler symphony include the heckelphone (a rare bass member of the oboe family), the so-called "Wagner tubas," and a wind machine. But his use of an offstage brass section and cowbells could have been directly inspired by Mahler. One curiosity is that, in scoring for heckelphone, Strauss wrote pitches that go below its bottom note, which inspired the even rarer "lupophone" that can reach them. Our performance uses the more standard bass oboe, with extensions to achieve some lower pitches.

The work begins with *Night* in B-flat minor, starting with a nebulous descending scale and including the first appearance of the solemn mountain theme from the low brass. *Sunrise* emerges with a descending major scale (here A major) and a radiant triplet theme in D-flat, which appears later at key moments. These first two sections constitute the *Introduction*. The following *Ascent* introduces the main theme, a vigorous march idea in E-flat major (really the primary key of the entire work) that is associated with the upward climb. Another important climbing idea uses leaping short-long rhythms. During the ascent, the offstage band (which adds great difficulties to programming the work) makes its only brief appearance. The next section, *Entry into the Forest*, presents the downward-winding secondary theme, initially in C minor (closely related to E-flat). The main ascent theme appears in a new key, A-flat. Bird calls are vividly depicted in this extended section.

The next several sections are shorter and more developmental in character. The *Wandering by the Brook* passage increases in activity and culminates in the exceedingly pictorial *Waterfall* and *Apparition*, with rapidly falling wind and string figures along with bright percussion and harps. The first hints of themes that will culminate in the climactic *Summit* are heard here. The brilliant D major gives way to the remote B major for *On Flowering Meadows*, with short notes, including plucked strings, depicting the flowers. This leads to the *Alpine Pasture*, replete with Mahlerian cowbells and bleating sheep (using a woodwind flutter-tongue technique that Strauss had previously indulged in *Don Quixote*). Another *Summit* theme is first heard here, in the main key of E-flat major.

The next three sections are more unstable. The *Summit* theme just heard introduces *Through Thickets and Undergrowth on the Wrong Path*, and *On the Glacier* uses the short-long climbing figure over a long drum roll. The short-long figure is even more prominent in *Dangerous Moments*. We then arrive at the climactic *Summit*, with a new figure of ascending brass leaps of fourths and fifths along with the previously

heard melodies, in the bright key of F major. A hesitant, almost shy oboe melody is heard before the true climax arrives with the descending *Sunrise* theme grandly proclaimed in C major.

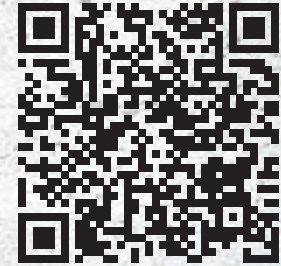
The key then shifts to F-sharp major for another extended passage, *Vision*, in which the organ makes its first entrance. Two short passages, *Mists Rise* and *The Sun Gradually Becomes Obscured*, lead to the *Elegy*, which introduces a new theme using long-short rhythm. In *Calm Before the Storm*, the timid oboe melody from the *Summit* appears, now with a sense of foreboding. The storm is evidenced by drum rolls and entry of the wind machine.

The *Thunderstorm and Tempest* accompany the *Descent*. The section begins in the work's opening key of B-flat minor, enhancing the sense of reprise and recapitulation. The downpour itself is illustrated in descending scales as in the *Night* theme. Here Strauss lets loose his full orchestral forces, including a thunder sheet at the storm's height. The ideas are heard in reverse order against the storm, and the *Ascent* theme itself is inverted. The *Woods* theme is heard in the main key of E-flat, another recapitulatory element.

The last three sections constitute the coda, with *Sunset* reprising the *Sunrise* theme in a new variant in the warm key of G-flat major. The main key of E-flat returns for the extended *Epilogue*, which features solo organ and is largely based on the *Sunrise* theme and the *Summit* ideas. The key moves to the opening B-flat minor for the reprise of the descending scales from the first *Night* music and the return of the solemn mountain theme. The final sounds come from the violins, outlining the main *Ascent* theme in a slow and straightened-out version, a spectral shadow of the vigorous march that fades with a glissando down to the final B-flat.

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Colorado MahlerFest is the world's longest-running, annual celebration of the life, legacy, and music of composer Gustav Mahler. Mahler tells a story with his music that is easy for anyone to understand and relate to in a deep and profound way. His music illuminates our shared human experience and reminds us of how deeply we are connected to each other. MahlerFest is one of only two North American organizations to receive the International Gustav Mahler Society's Golden Mahler Medal.



See the full MahlerFest 37 Program Book here.

Kenneth Woods, Artistic Director

'Woods knows his Mahler in the minutest detail and has the ability to impart to his musicians the essentials of his interpretation and make them respond spontaneously and enthusiastically.' Jim Pritchard (former chair, UK Mahler Society), MusicWeb International

'A little corner of Monmouthshire turned Viennese in March when Mahler's Ninth Symphony was performed at the Wyastone Concert Hall... Woods meets the biggest challenges well, bringing depth and sure consolation to the bare-boned final pages that could easily have fallen flat and empty.' Andrew Mellor, Gramophone

'Woods's Mahler... is not just gorgeous, but important. Truly valuable.' Dr. David Vernon, author of Mahler's Eleven Symphonies

Hailed by Gramophone as a "symphonic conductor of stature," conductor, cellist, composer, and author Kenneth Woods has worked with the National Symphony Orchestra (United States), Royal Philharmonic, Cincinnati Symphony, BBC



National Orchestra of Wales, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Royal Northern Sinfonia, and English Chamber Orchestra. He has also appeared on the stages of some of the world's leading music festivals, including Aspen, Scotia, and Lucerne.

Woods has served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the English Symphony Orchestra since 2013, as founding Artistic Director of the Elgar Festival in Worcester since 2018, and as Principal Guest Conductor of the Stratford-upon-Avon–based Orchestra of the Swan from 2010 to 2014. In 2015, he was made the second Artistic Director of Colorado MahlerFest.

Gustav Mahler's music has been a lifelong source of inspiration for Woods, who has conducted acclaimed performances of the symphonies and songs across the Americas and Europe. In 2011, Somm Records released Woods's first recording of Schoenberg's chamber ensemble versions of Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* and *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, which won the coveted IRR Outstanding Rosette from International Record Review. Off the podium, Woods is also much in demand as an essayist and speaker on Mahler's life and music. He has given talks and participated in panel discussions on Mahler for the BBC and multiple festivals and orchestras, and was the official blogger of The Bridgewater Hall's "Mahler in Manchester" series in 2010–2011.

As a cello soloist and chamber musician, Woods's collaborators have included members of the Toronto, Chicago and Cincinnati symphonies; the Minnesota, Gewandhaus and Concertgebouw orchestras; and the La Salle, Pro Arte, Tokyo, and Audubon quartets. Formerly cellist of the string trio Ensemble Epomeo, he co-founded the Briggs Piano Trio. Both trios' debut recordings received the prestigious Gramophone Editor's Choice.

A widely read writer and frequent broadcaster, Woods's blog, *A View from the Podium*, is one of the 25 most popular classical music blogs in the world.

Colorado MahlerFest Orchestra

VIOLIN I

*Alan Snow
Caroline Eva Chin
Yenlik Weiss
Stephen Cepeda
Erick Ramos
Cole Habekost
James Nance
Antonia Suarez Gomez
Carlie Geyer
Federico Orlando
Laura Pérez Rangel
Eli Pouliot
Adam Galblum
Imani Edwards

VIOLIN 2

*Sophia Ann Szokolay
Emily Acri
Holly Sidney
Sergio Lozano
Fred Jewell
Dario Landazuri
Jem Bradley
Logan Indge
Rebecca Ruttenberg
Rob Rubin
Lisa Marie Schoch
Sam Jarvis
Mary Hannig
Adam Cecil

VIOLA

*Lauren Spaulding
Aria Cheregosha
Hollie Dzierzanowski
Doug Westervelt

Avedis Escandon
Sarah Nichols
Ben Pochily
Sujin Kim
Amanda Hamilton
Heidi Snyder

CELLO

*Jeremy Cook
Eleanor Christman
Hayley Currin
Julia Emery
Anthony Marchese
Jarrod Tuikka
Mathieu D'Ordine
Monica Smiley

BASS

*Michael Geib
Jennifer Motycka
Isaiah Holt
Cristian Mazo
Dusty Munger
Jose Saavedra Diaz
Dan Bolger
Paul LePage

FLUTE

*Hannah Porter Occeña
Ysmael Reyes
Brice Smith (piccolo)
Elizabeth Robinson (principal piccolo)

OBOE

*Jordan Pyle
Sophie Maeda
Lisa Read (English horn)

BASS OBOE

*Kyle Sneden

CLARINET

*Gleyton Pinto
Steven M. Bass
Anoushka Divekar (Eb)
Jacob Eichhorn (Bass Clarinet)

BASSOON

*Sarah Fish
Erika Chiu
Madison Triplett
Christopher Pawlowski
(contrabassoon)

HORN

*Lydia Van Dreel
Bobbi Chambers (assistant)
Matt Taylor
Maddy Tarantelli
Tina Herod
Mason Stewart
Jonathan Glover
Brian T. Kilp
Cathy Verbyla
Maddie Levinson

ALPHORN

Marie Lickwar
Lauren Griffith

TRUMPET

*Daniel Kelly
Richard Adams
Maximillian McNutt
McKenna Hill

TROMBONE

*Lucas Borges
Jeremiah Umholtz (assistant)
Christopher Sharpe (bass trombone)
Daniel J. Morris (contrabass trombone)
Wesley Shores
Riley Bahin

TUBA

*Jesse Orth
Jeff Baker

TIMPANI

*Michael Baker
Matthew Dupree

PERCUSSION

*Jack Barry
Brian LaGuardia
Adam Vera

HARP

*Kathryn Harms
Dylan Allen

CELESTA

*Michael Karcher-Young

ORGAN

*Alaina de Bellevue



DANIEL W. DIETRICH II FOUNDATION



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COMMISSION

CREATE
BOULDER



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