## GUSTAV MAHLER
(1860–1911)

### *Blumine* (1884)
(8mins)

In March 1888, Gustav Mahler announced to his friends that he had finished a first symphony. The work has a long and tangled history: Mahler borrowed whole sections of music from earlier pieces, and even after apparently 'finishing' it, he took a further decade to actually finalise the shape and detail of the piece, ready for publication. What had begun as an idea for a 'grand symphony' had, in the meantime, morphed into a symphonic poem called *Titan*, and then back into Symphony No. 1. And along the way, an entire movement had vanished.

This piece, *Blumine*, is the movement that Mahler eventually removed from the symphony in the mid-1890s. It had been composed in 1884 as part of the incidental music for Viktor Scheffel's *Der Trompeter von Säkkingen* (*The Trumpeter of Säkkingen*). Mahler repurposed it as part of his symphonic poem, giving it a descriptive title (as he had all the movements of *Titan* by 1893) drawn from the writings of one of his favourite authors of the moment, Jean Paul Richter. But by the time he came to finalise the piece, he had grown dissatisfied with the overall shape of the work, so decided to cut *Blumine* altogether.

The piece is a gently lyrical 'Allegretto', a warmly romantic trumpet melody beginning the movement over rich strings. The central section is darker, the music falling into the minor and hinting at unspecified perils and anguish. But the sinister low strings are conquered by an extended oboe solo that leads the orchestra back to the optimism of the opening.

### *Humoresken* (songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*)
(1892–1898)
(55mins)

1. *Der Schildwache Nachtlied* (The sentry's night song) – baritone
2. *Verlor'ne Müh* (All in vain) – soprano
3. *Trost im Unglück* (Consolation in misfortune) – soprano & baritone
4. *Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?* (Who thought up this little song?) – soprano
5. *Das irdische Leben* (This earthly life) – soprano
6. *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt* (St Antony of Padua's sermon to the fishes) – baritone
7. *Rheinlegendchen* (A little Rhine legend) – soprano
8. *Lied des Verfolgten im Turm* (Song of the prisoner in the tower) – soprano & baritone
9. *Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen* (Where the beautiful trumpets blow) – soprano
10. *Lob des hohen Verstandes* (In praise of high intelligence) – baritone
11. *Urlicht* (Primeval light) – soprano
12. *Es sungen drei Engel einen süssen Gesang* (Three angels sang a sweet song) – soprano

PLEASE NOTE: English surtitles by Jonathan Burton will be displayed during the performance.

The order of performance was not confirmed at the time of going to print. Any alteration will be apparent from the surtitles during the performance.

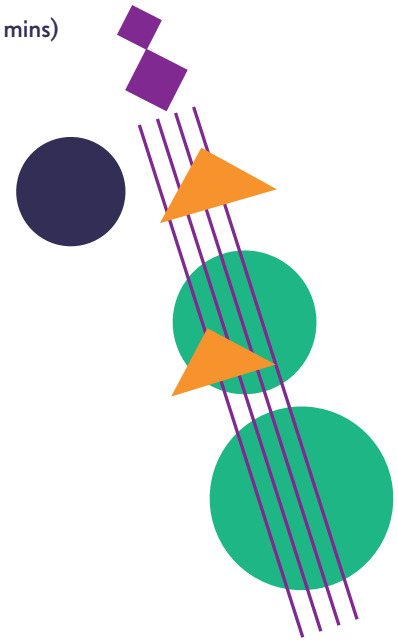
Mahler's symphonic output is intimately bound up with his love of literature and his numerous songs. One collection of poetry that seems to have struck a particular chord with him from the 1880s onwards is *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn). This anthology of folk poetry had been gathered together and edited by Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim in 1805, and many earlier composers (including Schumann, Mendelssohn and Brahms) had set selections. Now Mahler drew on the collection to produce several groups of Lieder (songs), a number of which fed into his first four symphonies. The *Humoresken*, published in 1899, was his most substantial published collection of *Wunderhorn* settings.

A number of the songs in *Humoresken* are conversations between two people. Mahler originally intended that only one singer would sing each song, writing distinctive music for each of the characters featured, so that we'd know who is speaking. Some performances nevertheless split the 'roles' between both voices, as in some (though not all) of these songs this evening.

In *Der Schildwache Nachtlied*, the young man being sent to war sings strong, strident lines, whilst his lover reassures him gently: "I'll wait for you." *Trost im Unglück* is also a conversation between soldier and lover, but here the girl gets the upper hand: when the Hussar reveals himself to be a pompous sort, she tells him not to bother staying faithful. She's on the lookout for someone far better! Between these two sits the comic *Verlor'ne Müh*, in which a flirtatious girl repeatedly tries and fails to persuade a young lad to walk out with her. In a more sinister turn, *Das irdische Leben* sees a child pleading for bread and, despite the reassurances of her mother that it will soon be ready, and the busy scurrying accompaniment telling us of the reaping and baking, the child has died of hunger by the time it is ready.

Since Mahler was free to pick texts from the collection as he liked, his choices reveal certain preoccupations. The military man is a recurring figure, not just in the songs mentioned so far, but also in the heartbreaking *Wo die schönen Trompeten blasen*, and perhaps also the prisoner in *Lied des Verfolgten im Turm*. Several poems are pointedly witty fables, such as the hopelessness of preaching to the swirling fish in *Des Antonius von Padua Fischpredigt*, and the music competition between cuckoo and nightingale in *Lob des hohen Verstandes*. Both birds whistle away in the accompaniment, submitting to the hee-hawing donkey for judgement. Several songs are set as *Ländler* (an Austrian peasant dance) – for example, *Wer hat dies Liedlein erdacht?* and *Rheinlegendchen*. The set concludes with two Christian texts: the magical *Urlicht*, in which the red rose stands as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for the world, and the light, bell-like chiming of *Es sungen drei Engel einen süssen Gesang*.

Interval (20 mins)



## ROBERT SCHUMANN
(1810–1856)

### Symphony No. 3 in E flat, Op. 97, *Rhenish* (1850)
(32mins)

*Lebhaft* (Lively)
*Scherzo: Sehr mässig* (Very moderately)
*Nicht schnell* (Not fast)
*Feierlich* (Solemn)
*Lebhaft* (Lively)

In the autumn of 1850, Robert and Clara Schumann made a day trip to Cologne, which lies on the river Rhine in western Germany. As part of this trip, they had their first glimpse of the city's cathedral, a mighty Gothic edifice that had been abandoned, incomplete, in the 15th century. Work had finally resumed in the 1840s, and it would eventually be completed to its original plan in 1880. It's the biggest Gothic church in northern Europe, with the largest facade of any church in the world. Not long after their visit, Robert Schumann composed a new symphony in E flat major that, as he informed his publisher, "here and there reflects a slice of life on the Rhein". But the symphony's nickname *Rhenish* was only added some years later, once the connection between the piece and the Cologne trip became common knowledge. The piece was premiered in April 1851 to tremendous popular and critical acclaim.

Unusually, this piece is in five movements rather than four. The most important precedent for this is Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony of 1809, in which Beethoven used the expanded format to create a narrative of scenes of country life. Although Schumann isn't explicit about the nature of each 'scene', the movements seem pictorial and covers a wide variety of moods and settings. Perhaps the most striking is the fourth movement, which originally bore the marking 'In the manner of accompanying a solemn ceremony'. This is surely Schumann's imagining of Cologne cathedral: church-like wind and brass groupings play interlocking imitative lines in the manner of early 17th-century choral music. It is also the movement that contemporary audiences found the hardest to grasp; but a canny reviewer pointed out that the grandeur of the construction was so striking that it still filled a listener with awe, even if they struggled to understand what was going on – which seems a fair comparison, after all, to staring at the architecture of a great cathedral.

The first movement is breathlessly exciting, strong and lively, and is perhaps a depiction of the Rhine itself. The dotted (uneven) rhythms of the opening and the strident writing for horns and trumpets give it a distinctly heroic colouring. It is followed by a gentle second movement which, although it is marked 'Scherzo', is really a kind of *Ländler*. Schumann seems to tip his hat to Beethoven in the third movement: the picture of a gently burbling stream is marked by prominent lines for woodwinds, which recalls the 'Scene by the brook' second movement of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony. The finale once again sees the horns prominent within the texture, and has an air of celebration. Schumann observed that throughout the symphony he had attempted to "capture the popular tone," and no doubt a large part of the work's success was due to the fact that so many of the melodies are eminently catchy and singable. Don't be surprised if you leave the concert humming them!

Programme notes by Katy Hamilton






## Esa-Pekka Salonen explains why he chose to pair Schumann's Third Symphony with Mahler's Songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.


Benjamin Ealovega

Musically, Mahler and Schumann had very little to do with each other. But there's a thematic connection between Schumann's Third Symphony and Mahler's *Humoresken* and that's the River Rhine. Schumann calls the Symphony *Rhenish*; and in Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* many of the songs are about the same river, and the dialect is frequently of the same region.

The Third Symphony happens to be my favourite Schumann symphony, and I think it would be in my top ten list of the best openings of any symphonic work. The river metaphor there is perfect – you are in a room by the river, and the windows are very thick, and when you decide to open your window, all of a sudden you can hear the massive power of the river: it's there, and it's been there all along, you just join it the moment you open the window. That's the feeling. The river metaphor is also clear for me in the slow movement (which Schumann says describes Cologne Cathedral). It has to do with the width of the river versus the speed of the water. Obviously, when the river is at its widest, it runs more slowly, so that's how the movement opens. But then Schumann uses the very same thematic material at twice the speed, and, in my mind, this is the moment when the river narrows down so, in order to push the same mass of water through, it has to go faster. Then this little motif becomes even faster in the last movement, as if the river is really shallow and very narrow and rocky. I'm not sure whether Schumann actually thought that way, but I don't care because it works for me.

Exclusive excerpt from a filmed interview by Marina Vidor, Digital Producer, Philharmonia Orchestra.

Esa-Pekka Salonen discusses Mahler in more depth at youtube.com/philharmonialondon