

Masterworks 4

Tania Miller, conductor / James Ehnes, violin

Saturday, November 21, 8 PM, Sunday, November 22, 2:30 PM

Lalo - Symphonie Espagnole,

Mahler - Symphony No. 5

Édouard Lalo (1823-1892)

***Symphonie espagnole* in D minor, Op. 21 (1875)**

Although Édouard Lalo falls short of being one of the most famous and immediately recognized French composers, his *Symphonie espagnole* quickly became and has remained a major concert favorite. His earlier works received only minor attention, but that changed when he became interested in writing "Spanish" music - an interest that was inspired by the playing (and probably also by the dynamic personality) of the great Spanish violin virtuoso Pablo de Sarasate. Sarasate, whose extraordinary virtuosity, richly sweet tone, and expressive interpretations gained him dedicated solo works from several major composers, including Saint-Saëns and Dvořák, attracted Lalo's attention in the 1870s, and he wrote and dedicated both a violin concerto and then the *Symphonie espagnole* to him.

For the *Symphonie espagnole*, Lalo decided to depart from the usual concerto format and create something entirely different -- a five-movement compositional hybrid that makes no pretense at evoking musical impressions of Spain and is in truth neither a concerto nor a symphony. Although the central (third) movement, an intermezzo, arguably contains some of Lalo's most virtuosic and expressive music, it has traditionally been omitted from performances.

The first movement begins with a fanfare and introduces an intermingling of duplet and triplet rhythms that lend a Spanish flavor to the music. The solo violin enters after three measures with the fanfare motive and thereafter remains at center stage. Although virtuosic pyrotechnics are on full display, the music's inventively managed lyrical and rhythmic treatment is even more impressive.

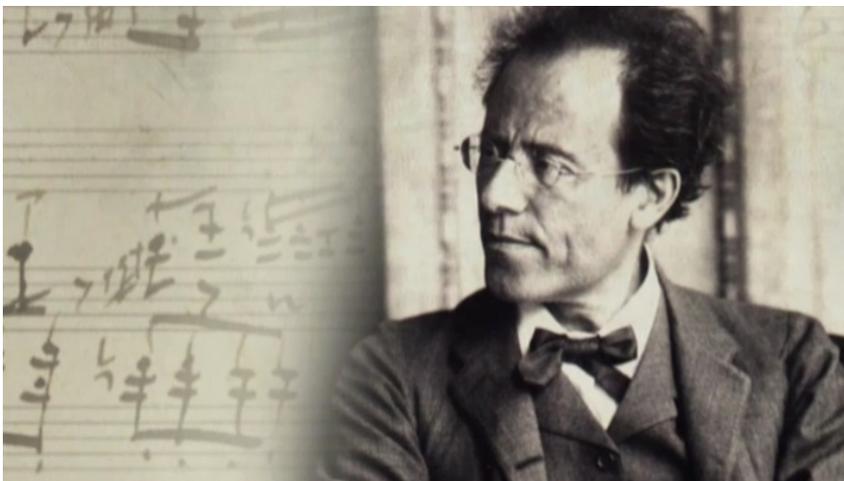
The second movement is a serenade, imbued with a seductive seguidilla dance rhythm, with the sound of the violin soaring over a guitar-like accompaniment of pizzicato strings and harp.

The *Intermezzo* alternates episodes in major and minor keys, playing up the dramatic contrast by placing the violin's solos in stark relief above the orchestra, and features some of the work's most virtuosic passages.

The fourth movement is the work's slow movement back in the work's home key. Here, at last, we get a touch of something tragic in the stern orchestral opening, answered by the sad, impassioned song of the violin. The orchestral accompaniment is deftly handled, swelling up under the violin without overpowering it.

In sharp and dramatic contrast, the final movement - a rondo - is a colorful and brilliant display piece. The main theme has the flavour of a folksong, but also serves as the springboard to a number of dazzling solo passages - and a central section brimming with a triumphant and celebratory feel, and a gypsy-style dance in the solo violin. The work concludes with a dazzling display of musical fireworks.

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Gustav Mahler
(1860-1911)
Symphony No. 5
(1901-1904)

Orchestration: 4 flutes (3rd and 4th = piccolos), 3 oboes (3rd = English horn), 3 clarinets (3rd = E-flat clarinet

and bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd = contrabassoon), 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (bass drums, cymbals, orchestral bells, snare drum, slapstick, tam-tam, and triangle), harp, and strings

Since his death in 1911, Gustav Mahler has come to occupy a central place in the history of music and in the orchestral repertory. With advances in recording technology, his symphonies have found a huge audience, one much larger than in the decades after his death, when a handful of dedicated acolytes championed his music in the concert halls of Europe and America. Mahler has also, just about a century later, emerged as a crucial bridge between the musical Romanticism of the 19th century and the modernism of the 20th, a composer who simultaneously summed up the achievements of his predecessors and pointed the way forward.

The Fifth Symphony occupies a pivotal place in Mahler's endlessly fascinating output. It was his first purely instrumental symphony since the First, which he had worked on during the 1880s and subjected to heavy revision in 1893. He composed the Fifth during the summers of 1901 and 1902, during his annual holiday from his job as director of the Vienna Court Opera. It was in Vienna the winter prior to beginning the Fifth Symphony that Mahler met Alma Schindler, the beautiful daughter of a famous landscape painter. Mahler proposed to her in the fall of 1901, and they soon married.

The symphony is in five movements, which are grouped into three parts. The work opens with a funeral march that starts with a trumpet fanfare whose rhythm dominates the movement. The march contrasts with two alternating sections, the first bursting out of the near-silence like some sort of terrifying, demonic carnival music, the second a more somber, restrained passage for the strings. The second movement builds on the material of that demonic music the opening movement. This is intense, raw music, frenetic in nature. The only respite comes with the appearance of a D-major chorale, a joyous, hymn-like passage that finds the sun temporarily piercing the charged gray hues of the surrounding storm clouds. Taken together, these two movements make up the first part of the symphony and foreshadow its overall trajectory, as the D-major chorale's reappearance in the finale confirms.

The third movement Scherzo is the symphony's longest movement and by itself comprises the work's second part. The music's episodic nature has a strong dramatic trajectory that prevents it from descending to mere sprawl - Mahler's rigorous intellect is on display here as he balances the tone of folksy Austrian country-dances and the more cultivated elegance of the

Viennese waltz. The central section, with its evocative horn solo (the horn plays a prominent role in the whole of this movement) and shadowy writing for the orchestra, has much in common with the "night music" movements of Mahler's Seventh Symphony.

The symphony's third and final part begins with the Adagietto, probably Mahler's "greatest hit"; it has often been performed as a stand-alone piece, most famously by Leonard Bernstein at Robert Kennedy's funeral in 1968. This slow movement silences everyone in the orchestra except for the strings and harp. According to the conductor Willem Mengelberg, an early Mahler champion, "This Adagietto was Gustav Mahler's declaration of love to Alma." The brilliant Rondo-Finale ensues without pause, a lively (and, in many of its pages, quite learned) celebration capped by the return of the chorale theme from the second movement.

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