

# Program Page

HOUGH FAMILY FOUNDATION MASTERWORKS

# Mahler's Symphony No. 4

Michael Francis, *Conductor*  
Maximilian Hornung, *Violoncello*  
Madison Leonard, *Soprano*

Saturday, January 28, 2023, Mahaffey Theater at 8:00 pm  
Sunday, January 29, 2023, Ruth Eckerd Hall at 7:30 pm

**Sir Edward Elgar**  
(1857-1934)

## Concerto for Violoncello in E minor, Op. 85

- I. Adagio
- II. Lento
- III. Adagio
- IV. Allegro

Maximilian Hornung, Violoncello

*Intermission*

**Gustav Mahler**  
(1860-1911)

## Symphony No. 4 in G major ♪

- I. Bedächtig; nicht eilen*
- II. In gemächlicher Bewegung; ohne Hast*
- III. Ruhvoll*
- IV. Sehr behaglich*

Madison Leonard, Soprano

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## Edward Elgar (1857-1934)

### *Cello Concerto, Op. 85 (1919)*

Duration: ca. 30 minutes

Few masterpieces in the canon of classical music open with such a gut-wrenching punch as Edward Elgar's *Cello Concerto*, a muted primal scream that descends into darkness over four connected movements.

If ever art imitates life, this is it – a personal testament through music on the ravages of war and the loss of optimism. Apart from the *lento* movement, sadness lingers throughout, as if we are hearing not a concerto but a requiem for cello and orchestra.

"I am more alone and the prey of circumstances than ever before," Elgar said at the time, reflecting on the devastation of the First World War. "Everything good and nice and clean and fresh and sweet is far away, never to return."

This was Elgar's last major work, one that seemed to drain him of any further desire to compose. It also shows the composer looking forward, shedding his stoic approach to music for a more modernist sound that had always been foreign to him. Unlike anything else he wrote, the *Cello Concerto* is intensely personal and aching in its emotion.

"There is no 'massive hope for the future' in this music," notes the English music critic Michael Kennedy, "only the voice of an aging, shattered man, a valediction to an era and to the power of music that he knew were dying within him."

The cello takes center stage in each interrelated section, opening with a poignant *adagio* full of introspection, each note by the soloist supported with chamber-like clarity from the orchestra. But the cello's often volatile recitative keeps listeners off balance as it threatens to tear away from anything comfortable and secure.

A perpetual-motion *scherzo* follows, the soloist at first hesitant before plunging headfirst into a theme that carries the rest of this fantasy movement. Although the centerpiece of the concerto, the *adagio* is the shortest movement, a lament full of wistful shading in the remote key of B-Flat Major.

The orchestra is fully awake in the *finale* – note the arresting blare of brass midway through – and the cello plays a bravura passage before the music returns to its dour mood. We hear a sad quote from the slow movement, then the cry that opened the work before orchestra and timpani bring everything to an unresolved close.

**Quarter note:** TFO has a rich history with the Elgar concerto, going back to 1971 with cellist Pierre Fournier under the baton of Irwin Hoffman. The group last performed it a decade ago when long-time principal cellist James Connors took the stage. Recordings are many, but if you're looking for the cream of the crop, it's hard to go wrong with Jacqueline du Pré's impassioned recordings from 1965 and 1967, both with the London Symphony Orchestra under John Barbirolli.

## **Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)**

### ***Symphony No. 4 in G Major (1900)***

Duration: ca. 54 minutes

“My time will come,” Mahler predicted in response to criticism of his music. Little more than a century ago, the public puzzled over his sprawling sound world, where beautiful and grotesque ideas seem to float aimlessly, crash into one another and stretch the limits of the imagination – if not patience. Thanks to such advocates as Leonard Bernstein in the 1960s, Mahler’s nine completed symphonies are firmly rooted in the orchestral garden, and often celebrated as highlights of a music season.

Mahler gives concertgoers their money’s worth. His symphonies aren’t just enormous in size, but in the depth and dimension of their message. Each symphony stands alone as an individual work, and together form a life cycle from birth to death and beyond. “The symphony must be like the world,” Mahler said. “It must embrace everything.”

The *Fourth* is Mahler’s most lyrical symphony, and at about 54 minutes his shortest, a place to pause before the onslaught of the massive works that follow. Here, Mahler looks at the world through the lens of a child, borrowing ideas from his earlier song cycle, *Youth’s Magic Horn*. In fact, he conceived the *Fourth* as a child’s dream, awakened from slumber in the final movement and expressed through song.

“In the three first movements, there reigns a serenity of the highest realm, a realm strange to us, oddly frightening, even terrifying,” Mahler said of his symphony. “In the finale, the child tells us what it all means.”

Mahler cast the music in the classical four-movement form, condensed from a larger six-part blueprint and trimmed of the excesses found in his two previous symphonies. He shed the usual rank of trombones to create a lighter sound, but expanded the percussion section for textural brightness, beginning with jingling sleigh bells that open the work.

TFO Music Director Michael Francis calls this Mahler’s most intimate symphony, “nostalgic and deliberately simplistic.”

But the first movement hardly sounds simple. Full of sharply changing themes and plunging climaxes, it takes listeners into dangerous waters, and we even hear a fading trumpet echoing the opening notes of the yet-to-be-composed *Fifth Symphony*.

A dark *scherzo* follows, with the concertmaster playing *scordatura* – tuned up a tone – to create the slightly off-key sound of a country fiddle. During this swaggering movement, two trios appear, reminiscent of peasant dances.

The lengthy (21 minutes) *adagio* serves as the work’s anchor. “This is a peaceful, stoic world,” adds Francis. “Toward the end of this movement is when the heavens open, the orchestra blasts forward, and the singer enters. It’s rapturous music.”

In the finale, Mahler introduces the wakened child who embraces “this heavenly life” amid a great feast attended by saints Ursula and Cecilia. Based on the German folk song *The Sky is Full of Violins*, the text of this radiant closing movement features a soprano soloist who sings of the bounty of food and how no music on earth can compare with the sound of angels.

***Program notes by Kurt Loft, a St. Petersburg-based freelance writer and former music critic for The Tampa Tribune.***