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CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Klaus Mäkelä Zell Music Director Designate ■ Riccardo Muti Music Director Emeritus for Life

ONE HUNDRED THIRTY-SIXTH SEASON

Thursday, October 1, 2026, at 7:30

Friday, October 2, 2026, at 1:30

Saturday, October 3, 2026, at 7:30

Sunday, October 4, 2026, at 3:00

Klaus Mäkelä Conductor

MAHLER

Symphony No. 9 in D Major

Andante comodo

In the tempo of a moderate ländler

Rondo-Burleske: Allegro. Very defiantly

Adagio. Very slow and reserved

There will be no intermission.

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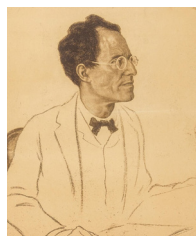
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GUSTAV MAHLER

Born July 7, 1860; Kalischt, Bohemia

Died May 18, 1911; Vienna, Austria

Symphony No. 9 in D Major



Because this symphony is Mahler's last completed work, and because he died tragically of heart disease at the age of fifty shortly after finishing it, leaving behind his beautiful wife Alma and young daughter Anna, it's often considered both his farewell and his most deeply personal score. Bruno Walter, who conducted the premiere thirteen months after Mahler's

death, said that he recognized the composer's own gait in the limping rhythm of the march at the climax of the first movement. Decades later, Leonard Bernstein suggested that the symphony's opening—with its hesitant, faltering rhythm in the cellos—was Mahler's erratic heartbeat.

Few composers' works invite autobiographical interpretation as readily as Mahler's. This is a particular distinction—and also a curse—of music as expressive as Mahler's Ninth Symphony. Certainly Mahler's own personal turmoil and spiritual uncertainty at the time he wrote this symphony account for its searching, fearlessly introspective nature, and he didn't discourage others from reading it this way. "In it something is said that I have had on the tip of my tongue for some time," he wrote to Walter in 1909.



COMPOSED

1909–April 1, 1910

FIRST PERFORMANCE

June 26, 1912; Vienna, Austria.
Bruno Walter conducting

INSTRUMENTATION

4 flutes and piccolo, 4 oboes (4th doubling english horn), 3 clarinets, E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, 4 bassoons (4th doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (cymbals, glockenspiel, chimes), 2 harps, strings

APPROXIMATE

PERFORMANCE TIME

87 minutes

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCES

April 6 and 7, 1950, Orchestra Hall.
George Szell conducting

August 11, 1979, Ravinia Festival.
Lawrence Foster conducting

MOST RECENT

CSO PERFORMANCES

June 8, 9, and 10, 2023, Orchestra Hall. Jakub Hrůša conducting

July 20, 2024, Ravinia Festival.
Marin Alsop conducting

CSO RECORDINGS

1976. Carlo Maria Giulini conducting.
Deutsche Grammophon

1982. Sir Georg Solti conducting.
London

1995. Pierre Boulez conducting.
Deutsche Grammophon

In 1907, two years before he began this symphony, Mahler's world had been turned upside down. On March 17 he resigned as artistic director of the Vienna Court Opera after ten years at the job, capitulating to friction with the administration and rising anti-Semitism in the press. (His career didn't falter, however: in June, he signed a contract with the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he would make his debut

conducting Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* on New Year's Day 1908.) On July 5, after Mahler had taken his family to Maiernigg (where he could write in peace) for the summer, his four-year-old daughter Maria died of scarlet fever. A few days later, the family physician diagnosed the heart disease that would kill the composer himself in less than four years.

Mahler refused to return to Maiernigg the next summer, so Alma found them a house in Toblach, in the Dolomites—a big farmhouse with eleven rooms, two verandas, and two bathrooms, “admittedly somewhat primitive, but in a splendid situation,” as she put it, referring to its sweeping mountain view. There, over the course of the next three summers, Mahler completed his last works—*Das Lied von der Erde* and the Ninth Symphony—and began the Tenth Symphony, which was left unfinished when his heart finally gave out.

Mahler's Ninth Symphony is neither his ninth (that most fateful of symphonic numbers) nor his final symphony. He had gone out of his way to sidestep the issue of writing nine symphonies, knowing that neither Beethoven nor Bruckner got further than that, by calling *Das Lied von der Erde* (which followed his Eighth Symphony) “a symphony for



contralto, tenor, and orchestra,” without giving it a number. And only a few days after completing his next symphony, which he openly—and perhaps defiantly—called his Ninth, Mahler plunged into a tenth, as if to make certain he had fooled the gods of superstition. But they had the last laugh.

All three of these works—the last of his eleven symphonic creations—were written while Mahler was obsessed with the idea of death, and in various ways they all reveal how deeply he was shaken by its immediacy. But Mahler didn't give in without a fight—even though his doctors tried to restrict his diet and warned him to cut out the swimming, cycling, and hiking he so enjoyed. His last four years, packed with conducting engagements, intense spurts of composition, and personal affairs (a meeting with Sibelius in 1907; posing for Rodin in 1909; and a single, dreaded, often-postponed session with Freud in 1910) hardly reflect the routine of an invalid.

While Mahler was sketching his Ninth Symphony in 1909, he wrote to Alma:

The “works” of this person or that . . . are the ephemeral and mortal part of him; but what a man makes of himself—what he becomes through the untiring effort to live

and to be—is permanent. . . . What we leave behind us is only the husk, the shell. *The Meistersinger*, the Ninth, *Faust*—all of them are only the discarded husk!

Unlike Wagner, Beethoven, or Goethe, Mahler couldn't trust that what he left behind would ever be understood or valued. He died without knowing the kind of acceptance and admiration that even Beethoven often enjoyed. Although the Eighth Symphony was warmly received at its premiere in September 1910 (shortly after Mahler completed the Ninth), it was his only real triumph as a composer during his lifetime; nothing else in *his* public career suggested that he would be remembered (except, perhaps, as a conductor), and that his Ninth would one day be accepted into the company of those by Beethoven and Bruckner.

When Alban Berg—another composer whose life also would be tragically cut short—played through the score of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, he wrote to his wife, Helene:

The first movement is the most glorious he ever wrote. It expresses love of this earth, for Nature; the longing to live on it in peace, to enjoy it completely, to the very heart of one's being, before death comes, as irresistibly it does.

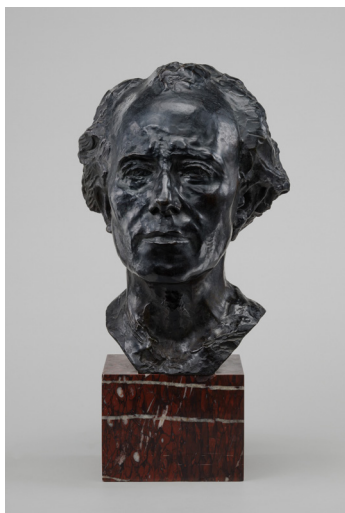
The Ninth Symphony is the fourth of Mahler's essays in "conventional" four-movement form, but it breaks with tradition at once: it's the first important symphony since Haydn's to begin with a slow movement. (Several, including Mahler's own Third, have slow finales.) But this is a new kind of slow movement, one that in its urgency,

power, complexity of material, and dramatic scheme—nearly all its characteristics *except* its tempo—behaves like a symphonic first movement. (It also includes much music that isn't slow—Allegro appears atop several passages, but the predominant speed remains Andante comodo—comfortable, easy.) "The whole movement," Berg wrote, "is based on a premonition of death which constantly recurs. . . . That is why the tenderest passages are followed by tremendous climaxes like new eruptions of a volcano." In fact, the entire movement appears to be organized around these recurring crescendos—each, until the final one, larger and more disruptive than the last. (The devastating, penultimate climax is marked "Mit höchster Gewalt"—with the greatest force.) In this music, Mahler retells his own private nightmare—with its successive waves of ominous premonitions—in purely musical terms.

It's simple enough to tell what was on Mahler's mind when he wrote this movement—the main theme resembles the motto of Beethoven's *Lebewohl* (Farewell) piano sonata; at one point, he sneers at a waltz by Johann Strauss, Jr., called *Freuet euch des Lebens* (Enjoy Life)—but the personal details have nothing to do with the force of the music. (The late Lewis Thomas, in his best-selling book of essays, *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler's Ninth Symphony*, wasn't reminded of Mahler's concerns; instead, he saw the end of humanity and envisioned a world in which thermonuclear bombs have begun to explode.)

In the following scherzo, Mahler draws on both the minuet and its historical forerunner, the *ländler*, to coin a kind of music that's far more complex, worldly, and pointed than either. The prominent Mahler scholar Deryck Cooke noticed that this movement sounds simple

PREVIOUS SPREAD, FROM TOP: Gustav Mahler, portrait, etching on woven paper, by Ferdinand Michl (1877–1951), ca. 1907 | Toblach, Tyrol, Austria (now Dobbiaco, South Tyrol, Italy), between 1890 and 1905. Mahler composed most of his Ninth Symphony at Toblach in 1909, working in a composing hut built behind the Hotel Trenkerhof. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Photochrom Prints Collection | **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The funeral of Gustav Mahler at Grinzing Cemetery, Vienna, May 22, 1911. Photograph issued by the firm R. Lechner (Wilh. Müller), Vienna. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam | **NEXT PAGE, FROM LEFT:** *Gustav Mahler*, 1909, bronze bust by Auguste Rodin (1840–1917), 1909. Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. | Alma (1879–1964) and Gustav Mahler near Toblach, 1909. Austrian National Library, Picture Archives and Graphics Department, Vienna, Austria



and cheerful when played on the piano, and that the hollowness and bitter, ironic flavor originate in its fantastical scoring. (The ending, with brief, whispered asides for various winds, a solo viola, and finally the piccolo, is a marvel of brilliant color.) There are two episodes (they would be called trios in a more conventional context) in different tempos—the first a vulgar-sounding waltz; the second slow, gentle, almost sentimental.

The third movement is another new kind of character piece; Mahler calls it a rondo-burleske and wants it played “very defiantly.” From the opening measures, which present several concise motives in a flash, this is dense, concentrated, tightly organized, and richly orchestrated music. Mahler inscribed the manuscript “to my brothers in Apollo,” and he addresses the leader of the muses with a virtuosic, elaborate, and almost savage display of counterpoint. Near the end is one magnificent passage of sudden serenity—particularly stunning in this context—crowned by a noble trumpet melody (itself a transformation of one of the movement’s more raucous tunes).

The slow finale, a grave and spacious adagio to balance the opening *Andante*, is a great hymn, begun by the full string choir. The

writing is austere and extraordinarily beautiful; at one point, a shining violin theme floats over a countermelody, very low in the basses, with nothing but octaves of silence between. Eventually, a broad chorale for the full orchestra unfolds, swells, and then recedes into a passage of pastoral calm and great clarity over a strumming harp before rising to a final climax.

The end is as much about silence, stillness, and waiting as about the notes themselves. The first violins sing a phrase from the *Kindertotenlieder*, the songs of grief on the deaths of children that Mahler, to his eventual horror, wrote shortly before the death of his own daughter Maria. In the last two dozen measures, very slow and *ppp*—one of the emptiest and most moving pages ever written—the music gradually, peacefully, and resolutely slips away. **C**

*Phillip Huscher has been the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1987. His history of the Orchestra, *Passing the Baton: The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Music Directors Who Shaped Its Greatness*, has just been published by The University of Chicago Press.*



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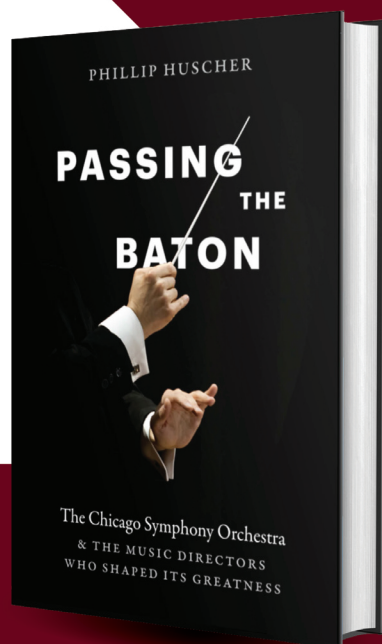
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In ***Passing the Baton: The Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Music Directors Who Shaped Its Greatness***, longtime CSO program annotator Phillip Huscher traces the Orchestra's remarkable history through the music directors who helped build, challenge and transform the ensemble — from its founding years to the modern eras of Fritz Reiner, Sir Georg Solti, Riccardo Muti and beyond.

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Klaus Mäkelä Zell Music Director Designate



Finnish conductor Klaus Mäkelä has been music director of the Orchestre de Paris since September 2021, and he served as chief conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic from 2020 to 2026. He assumes the title of chief conductor of the

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra Amsterdam in September 2027 and, in the same season, begins his tenure as Zell Music Director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Mäkelä's final season as music director of the Orchestre de Paris marks the culmination of a seven-year artistic partnership, with programs centered on large-scale choral and symphonic repertoire, including Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* and Mahler's symphonies nos. 3 and 8. This season also includes the world premiere of a new work by Thomas Larcher; Beethoven's *Triple Concerto* with Martha Argerich, Renaud Capuçon, and Gautier Capuçon; and a gala concert at Philharmonie de Paris featuring Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, a work that has become a defining thread of his collaboration with the orchestra.

Season highlights with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra include Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, Mahler's Symphony no. 7, Schumann's Symphony no. 1, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, Lotta Wennäkoski's *Flounce*, and the world premiere of a new work for orchestra by Magnus Lindberg. In December, Mäkelä

conducts the Amsterdam Christmas Matinee for the fifth time and leads the orchestra on tours to France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and Spain before returning to the Baden-Baden Easter Festival for the second installment of the orchestra's annual residency, where they present three programs.

With the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Mäkelä opens the season with a three-week residency, including performances of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* and Walton's *Belsbazaar's Feast* with baritone Thomas Hampson as soloist. In January 2027 he leads the Orchestra on its first international tour under his direction, with concerts in eight cities across Europe.

The season also includes an all-Finnish program pairing Sibelius's Symphony no. 1 with works by Lindberg in May and concludes with Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 and Boulez's rarely performed *Le soleil des eaux* in June. Mäkelä is an exclusive Decca Classics artist whose discography includes works by Stravinsky, Debussy, Berlioz, and Ravel with the Orchestre de Paris, as well as symphonies by Sibelius and Shostakovich with the Oslo Philharmonic. His most recent recording, Mahler's Symphony no. 8, was captured live with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra at the Mahler Festival 2025.

In the 2026–27 season, Klaus Mäkelä appears as guest conductor with the Vienna Philharmonic, Berlin Philharmonic, Orchestra del Teatro alla Scala in Milan, London Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, and the Munich Philharmonic. As a cellist, he partners with members of the Orchestre de Paris, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra for chamber music performances.

“

Friday was nothing less than a virtuoso display of the freedom and mutual trust that first sparked his CSO partnership.”

Chicago Tribune, on Mäkelä's debut performances at the Ravinia Festival



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Now in its 136th season, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is a global artistic leader, hailed as one of the most esteemed ensembles in classical music.

The ensemble's history began in 1889, when Theodore Thomas, the leading conductor in America and a recognized music pioneer, was invited by Chicago businessman Charles Norman Fay to establish a symphony orchestra. Thomas's aim to build a permanent orchestra of the highest quality was realized at the first concerts in October 1891 in the Auditorium Theatre. Thomas served as music director until his death in January 1905, just three weeks after the dedication of Orchestra Hall, the Orchestra's permanent home designed by Daniel Burnham.

Frederick Stock, recruited by Thomas to the viola section in 1895, became assistant conductor in 1899 and succeeded the Orchestra's founder. His tenure lasted thirty-seven years, from 1905 to 1942. Stock founded the Civic Orchestra of Chicago—the first training orchestra in the U.S. affiliated with a major orchestra—in 1919, established youth auditions, organized the first subscription concerts especially for children, and began a series of popular concerts.

Three conductors headed the Orchestra during the following decade: Désiré Defauw was music director from 1943 to 1947, Artur Rodziński in 1947–48, and Rafael Kubelík from 1950 to 1953. The next ten years belonged to Fritz Reiner, whose recordings with the CSO are still considered hallmarks. Reiner invited Margaret Hillis to form the Chicago Symphony Chorus in 1957. For five seasons, from 1963 to 1968, Jean Martinon held the position of music director.

Sir Georg Solti, the Orchestra's eighth music director, served from 1969 until 1991. His arrival launched one of the most successful musical partnerships of our time. The CSO made its first overseas tour to Europe in 1971 under his direction and released numerous award-winning recordings. Beginning in 1991, Solti held the title of music director laureate and returned to conduct the Orchestra each season until his death in September 1997.

Daniel Barenboim became ninth music director in 1991, a position he held until 2006. His tenure was distinguished by the opening of Symphony Center in 1997, appearances with the Orchestra in the dual role of pianist and conductor, and twenty-one international tours. Appointed by Barenboim in 1994 as the Chorus's second director, Duain Wolfe served until his retirement in 2022.

In 2010, Riccardo Muti became the Orchestra's tenth music director. During his tenure, the Orchestra deepened its engagement with the Chicago community, collaborated with visionary musicians and composers, and realized many notable performances of operas in concert. In September 2023, Muti became music director emeritus for life.

In April 2024, conductor Klaus Mäkelä was announced as the Orchestra's eleventh music director and will begin an initial five-year tenure as Zell Music Director in September 2027. In July 2025, Donald Palumbo became the third director of the Chicago Symphony Chorus.

Carlo Maria Giulini was named the Orchestra's first principal guest conductor in 1969, serving until 1972; Claudio Abbado held the position from 1982 to 1985. Pierre Boulez was appointed as principal guest conductor in 1995 and was named Helen Regenstein Conductor Emeritus in 2006, a position he held until his death in January 2016. From 2006 to 2010, Bernard Haitink was the Orchestra's first principal conductor. Pianist Jean-Yves Thibaudet is the CSO's artist-in-residence for the 2026–27 season.

The Orchestra first performed at Ravinia Park in 1905, later helped to inaugurate the Ravinia Festival in 1936, and has been in residence nearly every summer since. Listeners enjoy the weekly CSO Radio Broadcast series as well as releases from the ensemble's extensive commercial discography. Recordings by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus have earned sixty-five Grammy awards from the Recording Academy.

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Scott Hostetler

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- **Electronic devices:** Before the concert begins, mobile phones and other electronic devices must be turned off or set to silent mode. The use of photography, audio, and video equipment is not permitted during the music.

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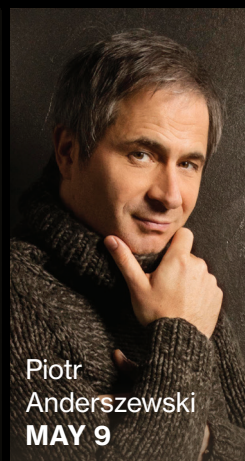
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