accent concerts

foosa philharmonic

Thomas Loewenheim
Artistic Director

JUNE 23, 2017 @ 8PM

The Music Center's
Walt Disney Concert Hall

RICHARD STRAUSS
Don Juan

JOSEPH BOHIGIAN
Subnatural Delights

GUSTAV MAHLER
Symphony No. 6 "Tragic" in A Minor

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

FOOSA is a partnership between Fresno State and the Youth Orchestras of Fresno.

FOOSA began in the summer of 2013 as the **Fresno Opera & Orchestra Summer Academy** (hence the acronym, FOOSA). In its first iteration FOOSA featured not just a full orchestra but also a full operatic cast of soloists and chorus and culminated with stellar performances of two fully staged operas, Cavalleria Rusticana and I Pagliacci. In the summer of 2014, FOOSA SE—String Edition—was another stellar success. The emphasis on daily private instruction with world-class instrumental faculty caused participants to enjoy unprecedented improvement in a short time. Their success led to the creation of FOOSA 2015, full-orchestra edition, which allowed young wind and brass players to take advantage of the kinds of exceptional experiences that had benefitted their string-playing peers. FOOSA 2017 has expanded the full-orchestra concept with the giant Mahler Six ensemble, also offering a Half-Day Program for younger players. This year's FOOSA Philharmonic program has 105 participants. With the added faculty members, the orchestra is more than 125-strong. Learn more at www.foosamusic.org.

Dr. Thomas Loewenheim joined the Youth Orchestras in 2007 as conductor of the Youth Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed Music Director in January 2008. He also serves as Head of Strings, Professor of Cello, and Conductor of the University Orchestra at California State University, Fresno, and as Artistic Director of the FOOSA Festival/Fresno Summer Orchestra Academy. Dr. Loewenheim, who was the recipient of Fresno State's 2016 Provost Award for Excellence in Teaching, enjoys an international career, combining cello performance, conducting, and teaching. He has toured North America, Europe, the Middle East, and the Far East, performing as soloist, recitalist, and chamber musician. As a conductor, Dr. Loewenheim has earned a reputation for getting the most out of any orchestra, whether coming in for a single performance or festival week, as at the Hong Kong International School Choral and Orchestra Festival, or building an orchestra over a period of years, as at Memorial University in Newfoundland, or the Musical Arts Youth Orchestra in Bloomington, IN. He founded the iMAYO international festival in Bloomington, Indiana, and was a co-founder of the international Tuckamore chamber music festival in St. John's, Newfoundland. He is the 2014 winner of the California Music Educators Association John Swain College/University Educator Award. Dr. Loewenheim earned a doctorate in cello performance from the renowned Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, where he studied with Janos Starker and Tsuyoshi Tsutsumi, and was mentored in conducting by David Effron. He received a master's degree from the University of Michigan under Erling Blöndal Bengtsson and a bachelor's degree from the Rubin Academy for Music and Dance in Jerusalem. He also took part in master classes with Yo-Yo Ma, Mischa Maisky, Antonio Meneses, Arto Noras, Aldo Parisot, William Pleeth, and Menahem Pressler, among others. He plays a Jean Baptiste Vuillaume cello, made in 1848.

Joseph Bohigian is a composer, percussionist, and pianist whose music is characterized by the obsessive pursuit of singular ideas and a gradual unfolding of sustained tension. His interest in loud, aggressive sounds stems from his background as a percussionist and is reflected in the jagged rhythmic quality common to his work. Joseph's works have been heard around the world at the Oregon Bach Festival, June in Buffalo, Festival Internacional de Música Contemporânea, New Music on the Point Festival, Australian Percussion Gathering, Aram Khachaturian Museum Hall, and more. His music has been performed by the Mivos Quartet, Argus Quartet, members of New Thread Quartet, flutist Robert Dick, violinist Eva Ingolf, and pianist Guy Livingston and featured on NPR's "Here and Now" and "The California Report." Bohigian is currently a graduate student at Stony Brook University and received his BA degree in composition from California State University Fresno. He has also studied with Artur Avanesov in Yerevan, Armenia and curated concerts for the Composer's Voice Concert Series in New York City.

The FOOSA program is dedicated to presenting free concerts each summer in Fresno and Los Angeles. Please consider supporting this mission and contributing the cost of a concert ticket, if you are able, by visiting **www.foosamusic.org/mahler**

Don Juan

Richard Strauss (1864-1949)

3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, strings

Composed 1888. First performance: November 11, 1889, Weimar, Germany. Weimar Opera Orchestra, cond. Richard Strauss.

Since long before Mozart, composers have attempted to portray art and literature through music. Mendelssohn, Berlioz, and (most notably) Liszt made strides in this direction with efforts that remained firmly rooted, despite Liszt's best attempts, in classical structure. The term "Tondichtung" (tone poem) was first used in the mid-19th century, and program music gained increasing popularity throughout the Romantic era. However, it was with the 24-year-old Richard Strauss' *Don Juan* that the tone poem truly came into its own.

Strauss' success in this work lay largely in his treatment of musical form. Earlier composers made great attempts at musicalizing dramatic and poetic source material. However, while prior "symphonic poems", such as Liszt's, generally developed their musical form first and then worked the programmatic material into that structure, Strauss chose in *Don Juan* to take the opposite approach. The work's structure follows the dramatic arc of the tale told in the source poem by Nikolaus Lenau, and the music unfolds organically as the plot reveals itself.

The result is a piece with a profoundly satisfying dramatic arc and structure which nonetheless defies traditional labels. Many music theorists have chosen to view the work as a heavily-modified rondo (a form featuring a recurring primary theme that alternates with various differing verses or episodes). Though the work's alternation between statements of the "hero" theme and episodes describing his romantic exploits do share some similarities with the rondo, the differences are too many to make this a convincing explanation.

It wasn't just the piece's structure that made *Don Juan* revolutionary. This work makes demands on the orchestra that far exceed anything previously composed. The musicians are expected to perform effortlessly at the extremes of their instruments' ranges, and the work demands breath control from the wind players unmatched in earlier music. The story is told that during rehearsal for the work's premiere, a horn player asked Strauss if Beethoven's sixth symphony was still to follow the piece on the program. Strauss confirmed this, and the horn player muttered, "That remains to be seen."

Don Juan opens with one of the most dramatic flourishes in musical history as our protagonist bounds onto the stage, a dashing Romantic hero in the Byronic mold, devoting his life to the pursuit of the ideal woman. After each relationship (the four "verses" of the rondo) fails to satisfy him, his theme returns, taking him back into the chase. Each woman has a distinct character portrayed through the music. In fact, at a 1904 rehearsal, the composer told the Boston Symphony not to play one section so beautifully: "That woman was just a common tramp!" The young paramour finds his pursuit to be increasingly fruitless, however, and, succumbing to his own despair, allows himself to be killed in a duel. Rather than the grand finale we might have expected from the opening fanfare, Strauss leaves us with a strain of pensive, hesitant tones as our hero breathes his last. — Chris Myers

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Subnatural Delights

Joseph Bohigian (b. 1993)

3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (3rd doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets in C, 2 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, strings

Composed 2017. First performance: June 23, 2017, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, California. FOOSA Philharmonic, cond. Thomas Loewenheim.

The title *Subnatural Delights* comes from an episode of the podcast *Gastropod* which explores the concept of subnature as it relates to food. Subnature is an architectural term described by the podcast's hosts Cynthia Graber and Nicola Twilley as "the less desirable aspects of the built environment: puddles, pollution, and pigeons." In the episode "Smoked Pigeon and Other Subnatural Delights," they identify foods such as smoked pigeon, stinky cheese, and sturgeon with its roe, marrow, and collagen coated in a corn fungus crust as subnatural. In a similar way, certain elements of my *Subnatural Delights* are inspired by subnatural sounds in our environment. Noise pollution of various kinds, such as the subterranean rumbling of a subway or the repetitive hammering of construction serve as a jumping off point for the piece, which begins with a growling texture in the lowest reaches of the orchestra and moves to a place where these subnatural sounds become, I hope, a source of delight. — Joseph Bohigian

Symphony No. 6 "Tragic" in A minor

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

piccolo, 4 flutes (3rd and 4th doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (3rd and 4th doubling English horn), English horn, 4 clarinets, bass clarinet, 4 bassoons, contrabassoon, 8 horns, 6 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, 2 harps, strings

Composed 1903-04 (rev. 1906). First performance: May 27, 1906, Stadtischer Saalbau, Essen, Germany. Combined Orchestras of Essen and Utrecht, cond. Gustav Mahler.

I. Allegro energico, ma non troppo
II. Andante moderato
III. Scherzo. Wuchtig
IV. Finale: Allegro moderato

By 1902, Gustav Mahler's career was at a high point with his success as conductor of the Vienna Court Opera. He had recently married Alma Schindler, who gave birth to their first daughter a few months later. A second daughter followed in 1904. He was as happy as he would ever be.

It may seem strange, then, that this period also saw the composition of the two most despair-filled pieces in Mahler's output– the *Kindertotenlieder* (*Songs on the Death of Children*) and the Sixth Symphony. Mahler wasn't just any composer, though. He was the ultimate Romantic: an emotional, superstitious genius who found purpose in battling his own demons to bring a glimpse of the divine into our world. Alma was truly his soulmate in this regard, believing wholeheartedly in her husband's mission to address the great philosophical and cosmic questions through music.

It's not hard to imagine Mahler seeing this idyllic time in his life as a safe opportunity to confront his fears on becoming a father and to prepare himself emotionally for the tragedies that might befall him and his growing family. He later admitted as much with *Kindertotenlieder*, writing, "I put myself in the position as though a child of mine had died; when I had actually lost a daughter, I could no longer have written the songs."

Whatever his inspiration, Alma claimed to have recognized the Sixth Symphony as a portent when he first played the piano score for her. They both wept, she said, as they pondered the terrible vision Mahler had been granted. "No work flowed so directly from his heart," she later wrote. "The Sixth is his most personal work, and a prophetic one, as well." For Alma, the word "prophetic" wasn't metaphor. Her husband's genius allowed him to see beyond the constraints of time through his art. She believed his melancholic character arose from the realization that he was powerless to alter the course of destiny foretold in these visions.

The most significant of these visions were the symphony's "hammer blows". These were written for a unique instrument conceived by Mahler specifically for this score. While he was vague on the details, he said that the sound should be a "short, powerful but dull-sounding blow of non-metallic character, like the fall of an ax." Alma believed that these moments represented crushing blows of fate dealt against the piece's hero, and she was deeply unsettled by them, convinced that Mahler was tempting the universe to visit tragedy upon their family. At her request, he removed the final blow when revising the piece.

Until her death, she believed that these hammer blows represented prophetic visions of the three great tragedies that would strike their family. The first was the death of their oldest daughter a year after the symphony's premiere. Months later, Mahler was forced to resign as conductor of the Vienna Opera—the second blow. The third blow, which she so earnestly begged him to remove from the score, was the diagnosis of the fatal heart condition that would eventually kill him.

While much of what we know about the creation of this work is due to her insider view, Alma Mahler's recollections should be taken with a grain of salt. She tended to take an even more mystic view of her husband's music than he did. She also had a habit of adjusting memories to fit her preferred narrative. For instance, she claimed that the Scherzo was inspired by watching their two daughters running about together on the beach, which isn't likely, as they were a newborn and one-year-old at the time.

Despite the grandeur of its subject and the significant mythology that has grown up around it, the Sixth Symphony is Mahler's most conventional in terms of form. It is his only symphony originally structured in the traditional four-movement structure with concentric tonality (ending in the same key it begins). However, the sheer scope pushes this structure to the limit.

Additionally, there is some controversy regarding the appropriate order of movements. Mahler originally composed and published the piece with the Scherzo preceding the slow movement, but shortly before the premiere, he switched to the more traditional Andante-Scherzo order typical of symphonies since Beethoven and before, bringing the piece even more in line with symphonic convention. Although he retained this order in performances and revised the published score to reflect the change, Alma inexplicably told one conductor after his death to use the original Scherzo-Andante order. Conductors have advocated both sides of the question ever since. In tonight's performance, you will hear the slow movement first, as Mahler conducted it at every performance during his lifetime.

The first movement is in traditional sonata form. Martial music opens the piece and juxtaposes A major against A minor. This march gives way to a soaring theme in the flutes and violins. Alma claimed that Mahler meant for this melody to represent her, and it suffuses the most joyful moments of the symphony. It is in the conflict between these two themes— the march of fate and Alma's love— that the symphony's drama emerges.

This striking opening movement is followed by the delicate melodies of the Andante, frequently interpreted as a more extensive portrait of Alma and a tribute to the Mahlers' love. The subsequent Scherzo appears with a restless return of martial music. An "old-fashioned" (Mahler's term) middle section presents an adorably childlike dance in constantly shifting rhythm and meter.

In the finale, fear and despair can no longer be restrained. The music begins to struggle against itself. Themes from prior movements appear, subjected to dramatic shifts of mood, tempo, and character. The music builds in intensity, fighting to overcome despair until it is cut down twice by hammer blows. It builds again to a third such climax, but we are met instead with sudden stillness. The militaristic motives return. This time, the music is unable to force the minor-key harmonies back to major. Despite heroic efforts, the battle is lost. Joy succumbs to A-minor despair and the triumph of fate.

It has become customary to speak of Mahler's Sixth as "hopeless" and "dark" (Walter Bruno's words) or "nihilist" (Wilhelm Furtwängler's description). It's true that the piece ends tragically, but to view an entire work through the lens of its conclusion is to ignore the drama. Early audiences, familiar with Mahler's previous symphonies, surely expected a similarly triumphant celebration of the human spirit. The heartbreaking downfall of the finale no doubt came as a shock, adding to its emotionally devastating impact.

This symphony fights a committed battle against the forces of fate, embracing love when it appears, reveling in the beauty encountered along the way, and refusing to give up hope so long as it has breath. The stakes are high, and at no point is tragedy a foregone conclusion. Like life itself, the Sixth Symphony has moments of transcendent beauty, pure joy, and deep sorrow. The beauty and drama lie in the struggle. And like life itself, the outcome is far from certain until the final moment.

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MAHLER 6 & STRAUSS Don Juan

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