



ABOUT THE MUSIC

Mahler's *Titan*

November 4, 5 & 6, 2023

Program notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

GIOVANNI GABRIELI

Canzon Septimi et Octavi Toni a 12, Ch. 182 from Sacrae symphoniae
Canzon Noni Toni a 12, Ch. 183 from Sacrae symphoniae



ARRANGER: Bruce Chrisp

COMPOSER: born c. 1554-57, Venice, Italy; died August 12, 1612, Venice, Italy

WORK(S) COMPOSED: The *Sacrae symphoniae* were published in 1597

WORLD PREMIERE: undocumented

INSTRUMENTATION: 5 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, and tuba

ESTIMATED DURATION: 6 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The music of Renaissance composer Giovanni Gabrieli is so intimately connected with the architecture of St. Mark's Basilica, in Venice, that one could argue convincingly for the building as a co-composer. St. Mark's Basilica, which fronts St. Mark's Square, in the heart of Venice, is built in the shape of a Greek cross. Its interior features soaring ceilings and facing balconies that sit high atop gold mosaic-covered columns. For Gabrieli, the balconies, in particular, shaped his musical conception, particularly his use of *cori spezzati* – split choirs of voices or instruments – each situated in a physically distinct space. Whether facing one another in the balconies or placed front and rear, the distinctive antiphonal sound of two groups dialoguing in space and time became Gabrieli's compositional signature.

The biographical details of Gabrieli's life are scant, including the exact year of his birth. He may have been raised by his uncle Andrea Gabrieli, who preceded Giovanni as the principal composer at St. Mark's; Giovanni described his relationship with Andrea as "little less than a son." After Andrea died in 1585, Giovanni, who had been St. Mark's organist, assumed his uncle's role as primary composer as well. It was during this time that he composed his finest works of sacred vocal and instrumental music.

Gabrieli had access to some of the best musicians in Italy, and he composed music designed to showcase their virtuoso talents. In particular, Gabrieli's writing for brasses demonstrates the caliber of the players he worked with, especially when you consider that 16th-century brasses had no valves, and changes of pitch were made entirely with the embouchure (mouth position). Most of Gabrieli's brass works were given the title *Canzon* or *Canzona* (Italian for "song"), along with an indication of which mode he had chosen for them. Modes, or church modes, are scales that predate modern tonality. Thus, the *Canzon septimi toni* indicates a work written in the Mixolydian mode, the seventh note of a scale beginning on note A.

CLARICE ASSAD

PLAY! for Orchestra (World Premiere)



COMPOSER: born February 9, 1978, Campo Grande, near Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

WORK COMPOSED: 2023

WORLD PREMIERE: November 4, 2023, Santa Rosa Symphony, Weill Hall, Green Music Center, Rohnert Park, CA

INSTRUMENTATION: 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets in Bb, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns in F, 2 Trumpets in C, 2 Trombones, 1 Tuba, Timpani, Percussion Solo Vocalist, Percussion Quartet Strings
Percussion (orchestra): Triangle, Suspended and Sizzle Cymbal, Large bass drum, Large Tam Tam

ESTIMATED DURATION: 20 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Brazilian-American composer, pianist, arranger, and singer Clarice Assad hails from an illustrious musical family. Daughter of guitarist Sergio Assad and niece of guitarist Odair Assad and singer-songwriter Badi Assad, Clarice's music infuses popular Brazilian culture, Romanticism, world music, and jazz into her unique sound palette. *Latin Jazz Network* hails Assad as "quite simply a phenomenon who has streaked across the world's musical landscape like one of those comets that appears just once in a lifetime."

"There are many meanings to the word 'play,'" Assad explains. "For some, it might be about escaping the stresses of life or finding space for creativity and imagination to bloom, but the list continues. Once we begin pondering the word itself, there are endless possibilities: musicians play instruments, actors perform in a play, athletes play sports, and so forth. Negative definitions of the word also exist. Some evoke the sinister, like a child playing with fire, a wicked person playing psychological games with another, or an addict who may lose everything from playing in a casino.

"This fascination with this word and its meaning drove me to explore this topic and transform these ideas into sound with the stunning percussion quartet THIRD COAST PERCUSSION, following our recording project *Archetypes*, which received three Grammy nominations.

"*PLAY!* will be a concerto in five movements, for the five of us to perform with orchestra. The idea is to explore the many sides of the word and its meaning through sound and dramatic performance, for example, using toys in a movement that showcases a toy factory through generations, partially choreographed, ending in the digital revolution. We will also explore moments of virtuosity, improvisation, and even play with words. Each movement will have a storyline as a focus.

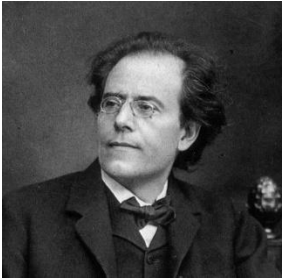
"To me, 'play' has always been about exploring and discovering new worlds, feeling like a child again by finding awe in the little things in life. As an artist, I strive for connection through my work and find that playfulness can also be a powerful way to click with people, as we may put aside our differences and worries for a while. So, also, as part of the piece, the quintet will engage with the audience through an exciting encore.

PLAY! by Clarice Assad was commissioned for Third Coast Percussion by the Santa Rosa Symphony, Resident Orchestra of the Green Music Center, Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director. The work was co-commissioned by the Grand Teton Music Festival, Sir Donald Runnicles, Music Director; and the Wheeling Symphony Orchestra, John Gennaro Devlin, Music Director. Additional support was provided by Bruce Oltman, the Maxine and Stuart Frankel Foundation, the Julian Family Foundation, and Steph and Daniel Heffner.

Photo by Marcelo Macaue

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 1 in D Major, *Titan*



COMPOSER: Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, [now Kaliště, Jihlava in the Czech Republic], Bohemia; died May 18, 1911, Vienna, Austria

WORK COMPOSED: 1884-88, revised 1893-96

WORLD PREMIERE: Mahler conducted the Budapest Philharmonic in Budapest on November 20, 1889

INSTRUMENTATION: 4 flutes (three doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (one doubling English horn), 4 clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), 7 horns, 5 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, 2 sets of timpani, bass drum, cymbals, gong, triangle, harp, and strings

ESTIMATED DURATION: 56 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Like many composers, Gustav Mahler was both drawn to and wary of the notion of programmatic music. Mahler wrestled with the idea of linking his musical ideas with non-musical inspirations, fearing that his first symphony would not be considered as legitimate as a piece of “absolute” music. At the same time, the attraction of an underlying narrative as a unifying structure held great appeal for Mahler.

The argument for the Symphony No. 1 as program music is strengthened by the fact that much of its musical material was borrowed from other sources. In the first two movements, Mahler used melodies from two of his *Songs of a Wayfarer* as the basis for elaborate thematic development. In the third movement, he set the folk song “Brother Martin,” also known as “Frère Jacques,” in a somber minor key. In the final movement, Mahler wanders further afield, repurposing material from Franz Liszt’s “Dante” Symphony and Richard Wagner’s *Parsifal*. “Composing is like playing with building blocks, where new buildings are created again and again, using the same blocks,” wrote Mahler to a friend. Finally, despite Mahler’s ambivalence about associating his music with a specific program, he did provide one to music critic Ludwig Karpath (something he later regretted). The *Titan* Symphony’s overall narrative describes, in Mahler’s words, “a strong, heroic man, his life and sufferings, his battles and defeat at the hands of Fate.”

During the 1880s, as Mahler worked on Symphony No. 1, he made his living as an opera conductor for several regional theatres. As a result, Mahler’s demanding performance schedule left him neither time nor energy to compose during the concert season. Only during summer vacations, when he was free from theatrical engagements, could Mahler devote himself completely to composition.

At the symphony’s premiere, audiences were disturbed by the third movement, with its ghostly reworking of a children’s folksong in the tempo of a funeral march. Presumably, the audience did not pick up on Mahler’s sardonic intentions, although he indicated this music was full of “biting irony,” in which “all the coarseness, the mirth and the banality of the world are heard in the sound of a Bohemian village band, together with the hero’s terrible cries of pain.” The loutish parody of the band, complete with oom-pahs, mingles with music taken from another of Mahler’s *Wayfarer* songs, “Die zwei blauen Augen” (Your Two Blue Eyes), which resembles a melody from Jewish liturgy. In the late 19th century, Viennese society was particularly anti-Semitic, which may also have contributed to the audience’s negative reaction.

In the finale, according to Mahler’s narrative, “the hero is exposed to the most fearful combats and to all the sorrows of the world. He and his triumphant motifs are hit on the head again and again by Destiny ... Only when he has triumphed over death, and when all the glorious memories of youth have returned with themes from the first movement, does he get the upper hand, and there is a great victorious chorale!” Destiny intervenes with pounding brasses and timpani, full of *Sturm und Drang* (storm and stress), but a triumphant brass choir hints at the hero’s ultimate victory, even as he continues to struggle with the forces bent on his destruction. Finally, the chorale bursts forth (some listeners have discerned traces of the “Hallelujah Chorus” from Handel’s *Messiah* in it) and concludes the symphony, with the horns standing to play their final triumphant notes.

“It’s the most spontaneous and daringly composed of my works,” said Mahler of his first symphony. “Naively, I imagined that it ... would have ... immediate appeal ... How great was my surprise and disappointment when it turned

out quite differently. In Budapest, where I first performed it, my friends avoided me afterward... I went about like a leper and an outlaw." Both critics and audiences reacted negatively at the premiere, with one critic deriding it as a parody of a symphony. The influential and musically conservative Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick was equally harsh: "The new symphony is the kind of music which for me is not music." Subsequent performances, even after Mahler made substantial revisions, provoked equally strong reactions. More than ten years after the "Titan's" premiere, another critic described the audience's reaction: "There were startled faces all around and some hissing was heard." Leonard Bernstein did much to promote Mahler's symphonies, which were largely unknown in the United States until after World War II. Over the course of his long career, Bernstein conducted and recorded Mahler's symphonies with orchestras around the world. Today, the "Titan" Symphony is Mahler's most popular and most frequently performed work.

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Elizabeth Schwartz is a writer and music historian based in the Portland area. She has been a program annotator for more than 20 years, and works with music festivals and ensembles around the country. Schwartz has also contributed to NPR's "Performance Today," (now heard on American Public Media).

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