SANTA ROSA SYMPHONY
2025–2026
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Francesco Lecce-Chong, Music Director
Resident Orchestra, Green Music Center

ABOUT THE MUSIC

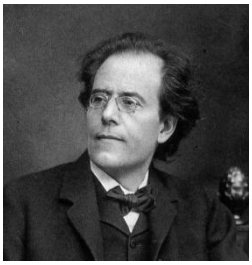
MAHLER'S THIRD

FEBRUARY 21, 22, 23, 2026

Program Notes by Elizabeth Schwartz

GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 3 in D minor for Mezzo-Soprano, Orchestra and Chorus



COMPOSER: Born July 7, 1860, Kalischt, [now Kaliště, Jihlava in the Czech Republic], Bohemia; died May 18, 1911, Vienna
WORK COMPOSED: 1895-96, *rev*. 1899, 1906
WORLD PREMIERE: Mahler conducted the first complete performance, with contralto Luise Geller-Wolter, at the Festival of the Allgemeiner Deutscher Musikverein at Krefeld on June 9, 1902.
INSTRUMENTATION: SATB chorus, youth choir, mezzo soprano, 4 flutes (all doubling piccolo), 4 oboes (one doubling English horn), 5 clarinets (2 doubling E-flat clarinet and one doubling bass clarinet), 4 bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), 8 horns, posthorn (offstage), 4 trumpets, 4 trombones, tuba, 2 timpani, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, glockenspiel, rute, snare drum, tam tam, tambourine, triangle, 2 harps, and strings
ESTIMATED DURATION: 92 minutes

ABOUT THE MUSIC

"My symphony will be something the like of which the world has never yet heard! In it all of nature finds a voice." – Gustav Mahler

Perhaps no other composer wrestled more with the concept of program music – music that derives from a non-musical story, idea, poem, or other non-musical inspiration – than Gustav Mahler. When Mahler began composing his Third symphony, he was initially inspired, according to scholar Constantin Floros, by "a tiered arrangement of creation (plant world, animal world, human world, and angel world)." Accordingly, Mahler mapped out an outline featuring multiple movements, each with its own title reflecting this cosmic hierarchy. As the music took shape, Mahler's concept of the symphony grew and changed; he made and discarded seven different scenarios for the symphony's movements, and eventually settled on this format:

First Part:	Pan Awakes. Summer Comes Marching In (Bacchic procession)
Second Part:	What the Flowers in the Meadow Tell Me
	What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me
	What Humanity Tells Me
	What the Angels Tell Me
	What Love Tells Me

However, by the time the Third premiered, in 1902, Mahler removed all explanations of the music from the score, including the movement titles. "Beginning with Beethoven, there is no modern music without its underlying program," Mahler wrote to critic Max Kalbeck. "But no music is worth anything if you first have to tell the listener what experience lies behind it, respectively, what he is supposed to experience in it. – And so yet again: pereat [perish] every program! – You just have to bring along ears and a heart and – not least – willingly surrender to the rhapsodist. Some residue of mystery always remains, even for the creator." At the same time, Mahler recognized that listeners would instinctively fashion their own

"program" or interpretation of what they heard. As he wrote to conductor Josef Krug-Waldsee, "These titles … will surely say something to you *after* you know the score. You will draw intimations from them about how I imagined the steady intensification of feeling, from the indistinct, unbending, elemental existence (of the forces of nature) to the tender formation of the human heart, which in turn points toward and reaches a region beyond itself (God). Please express that in your own words, without quoting those extremely inadequate titles, and that way you will have acted in my spirit."

Although he dispensed with the movement titles, Mahler retained the overall two-part structure of the Third Symphony. Part I consists solely of the first movement, one of the largest single movements in the orchestral repertoire (it lasts approximately 30 minutes). Mahler's penchant for heroic horn themes declares itself in the opening melody (the score calls for eight horns), which combines a simple design with a vigorous, militaristic quality. A series of marches, interspersed with delicate interludes, follows; the music seems to do battle with itself, darkness combatting light.

The movements of Part II are correspondingly shorter and less abstract, like a series of character pieces. The graceful minuet presents delicate melodies for strings punctuated by energetic, almost breathless bursts of agitation that hint at ominous portents below the surface of this seemingly delightful dance. An orchestral version of Mahler's song "Ablösung im Sommer" (Relief in summer), follows, in the form of a scherzo. Although Mahler had abandoned this movement's original title, "What the Animals in the Forest Tell Me," we can clearly hear birds and animals cavorting through the hot, languid days of summer. A solo posthorn, heard from offstage, heralds Pan's arrival.

In the fourth movement, which Mahler originally titled, "What Humanity Tells Me," a contralto sings the "Midnight Song" from Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical novel, *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. The text describes the great pain and even greater joy of the world, a joy seeking eternal expression. Mahler's accompaniment has a near-motionless quality, as of deep water flowing almost imperceptibly. Mahler segues immediately into the next movement, for contralto and both women's and children's choruses. This song, unlike many of the Wunderhorn texts, has a religious theme. Three angels rejoice in the redemption of Peter through Jesus, and that through Jesus' intercession on Peter's behalf, heavenly joy is likewise bestowed upon all humanity. The angelic chorus rings with merriment, a burbling childlike happiness, as the soloist intones Peter's confession of sin.

The tempo markings for the closing Adagio serve as the most complete description of the music: Slow. Calm. Deeply Felt. Mahler's original title for this movement, "What Love Tells Me," refers to "agape," a Christian concept of the highest form of love, the reciprocal love of God and humanity, and Mahler's use of the strings to slowly swell and build upon all that has come before conveys this eternal, changeless love in a profound manner.

Critics responded to the Third Symphony with a wide spectrum of opinions. Scholar Peter Franklin sums up the reviews: "On the positive side, we read of the exciting new work of an original genius, a prodigious, absolute master of the orchestra, who writes in a 'clear and intelligible' language, with 'modesty … and naivety.' The 'utterly serious' work is described as … achieving a 'glorious victory for the composer. On the negative side, we read of the stupefying and disconcerting first movement, banality, a lack of melodic invention and originality, linked to eclecticism and an absence of any sense of 'inner necessity' about the music. It included 'bizarre and trivial elements,' atrocious cacophony, 'incomprehensible platitudes' and rudely garish sounds which added up to chaos, even the order of the movements seeming arbitrary."

When Arnold Schoenberg first heard Mahler's Third Symphony in Vienna, he wrote to Mahler, "I felt the struggle for illusions; I felt the pain of one disillusioned; I saw the forces of evil and good contending; I saw a man in a torment of emotion exerting himself to gain inner harmony. I sensed a human being, a drama, truth, the most ruthless truth!"

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.)

Fourth Movement
Text: “Midnight Song” from *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Nietzsche)

O Mensch! Gib Acht!
Was spricht die tiefe Mitternacht? –
"Ich schlief, ich schlief – ,
aus tiefem Traum bin ich erwacht: –
Die Welt ist tief,
und tiefer als der Tag gedacht.
Tief ist ihr Weh – ,
Lust – tiefer noch als Herzeleid.
Weh spricht: Vergeh!
Doch all' Lust will Ewigkeit – ,
– will tiefe, tiefe Ewigkeit!"

O Man! Take heed!
What says the deep midnight?
"I slept, I slept – ,
from a deep dream have I awoken: –
the world is deep,
and deeper than the day has thought.
Deep is its pain – ,
joy – deeper still than heartache.
Pain says: Pass away!
But all joy
seeks eternity – ,
– seeks deep, deep eternity!"

Fifth Movement
Text: Des Knaben Wunderhorn

Es sungen drei Engel einen süßen Gesang,
mit Freuden es selig in dem Himmel klang.
Sie jauchzten fröhlich auch dabei:
daß Petrus sei von Sünden frei!
Und als der Herr Jesus zu Tische saß,
mit seinen zwölf Jüngern das Abendmahl aß,
da sprach der Herr Jesus: "Was stehst du denn hier?
Wenn ich dich anseh', so weinest du mir!"
"Und sollt' ich nicht weinen, du gütiger Gott?
Ich hab' übertreten die zehn Gebot!
Ich gehe und weine ja bitterlich!
Ach komm und erbarme dich über mich!"
"Hast du denn übertreten die zehen Gebot,
so fall auf die Knie und bete zu Gott!
Liebe nur Gott in all Zeit!
So wirst du erlangen die himmlische Freud'."
Die himmlische Freud' ist eine selige Stadt,
die himmlische Freud', die kein Ende mehr hat!
Die himmlische Freude war Petro bereit't,
durch Jesum und allen zur Seligkeit.

Three angels sang a sweet song,
with blessed joy it rang in heaven.
They shouted too for joy
that Peter was free from sin!
And as Lord Jesus sat at the table
with his twelve disciples and ate the evening meal,
Lord Jesus said: "Why do you stand here?
When I look at you, you are weeping!"

"And should I not weep, kind God?
I have violated the ten commandments!
I wander and weep bitterly!
O come and take pity on me!"
"If you have violated the ten commandments,
then fall on your knees and pray to God!
Love only God for all time!
So will you gain heavenly joy."
The heavenly joy is a blessed city,
the heavenly joy that has no end!
The heavenly joy was granted to Peter
through Jesus, and to all mankind for eternal bliss.