CSO AT MUSIC HALL | 2020–2021 SEASON
FRI MAR 5, 7:30 pm | SAT MAR 6, 7:30 pm

Matthias Pintscher, conductor
Michelle DeYoung, mezzo-soprano
Sean Panikkar, tenor

GUSTAV MAHLER
(1860–1911)
arr. Cortese

Das Lied von der Erde ("The Song of the Earth")
Das Trinklied vom Jammer der Erde ("The Drinking Song of Earthly Sorrow")
Der Einsame im Herbst ("The Solitary One in Autumn")
Von der Jugend ("Of Youth")
Von der Schönheit ("Of Beauty")
Der Trunkene im Frühling ("The Drunkard in Spring")
Der Abschied ("The Farewell")

This performance will last approximately 70 minutes; there is no intermission.
Watch this concert online starting Mar. 27; visit cincinnatisymphony.org for details.

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Post-Concert Q&As are endowed by Melody Sawyer Richardson.
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The Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra in-orchestra Steinway piano is made possible in part by the Jacob G. Schmidlapp Trust.
Steinway Pianos, courtesy of Willis Music, is the official piano of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Pops.
Matthias Pintscher occupies a unique place in the musical world, as a multi-talented composer, conductor, curator, and music director. We are thrilled to welcome back Matthias in his new role as our Creative Partner, conducting this heartbreaking and overwhelmingly beautiful synthesis of a symphony and a song cycle, Das Lied von der Erde.

—Louis Langrée, CSO Music Director

INSIGHTS
from Matthias Pintscher, Guest Conductor and CSO Creative Partner

Das Lied von der Erde is a transitional work.

Unintentionally—because it avoids precisely that transition from life to death, the other side of our living reality. Gustav Mahler composed this transitional symphony in the darkest hours and months of his young life, in the years 1908/1909. He had just lost his beloved eldest daughter, Maria, to a serious fever. Anti-Semitic intrigues and machinations had forced Mahler out of his position as director of the Vienna State Opera. He had just been diagnosed with a serious incurable heart disease, and was plagued by fears, paranoia even, of composing a “fateful” ninth symphony that marked the demise of so many composers of the past. Instead of a ninth symphony, Mahler composed Das Lied von der Erde—“the song of the earth”—in a small wooden hut (dubbed the “composer’s cottage”) in Toblach, in the northern Italian Dolomites. I myself had the good fortune to visit this “composer’s cottage” a few years ago and to feel the sense of horror that surrounded Gustav Mahler during these months.

With the exception of the sixth movement of this symphony, the “Farewell,” Mahler’s music strives for lightness and transparency, as if one were trying to withdraw one’s head from the vicious circle of fate. This music paints a discernable brightness that makes the abyss all the more evident.

One feels and hears that abyss, the height of the fall, the inevitable fate of that which is inexpressible and finite...even in the “brightest” key of G major in the fourth movement, where the sung text refers to young girls picking lotus flowers at the edge of a bank.

This subtext of the tragic in the apparently brightest moments has a tradition in Austrian music from before Mahler’s time. It can also be found in the music of Franz Schubert. Whenever Schubert modulates to C major in one of his later works, the music is enveloped in a sadness never to be found in other music before his time.

The music of Gustav Mahler created during this time is like the lotus flower sung about in the fourth movement: it floats beautifully, expressively, gently and elegantly floating on the surface of the water; although it grows out of the mud and is bound to the fateful darkness of the abyss.

This is what the music of Gustav Mahler in Das Lied von der Erde represents to me. Hope collapses in the lengthy final movement of the work and tells us about release, about decline.

It is a music of passage, of transition.... The meter and pulse of the music dissolve at the very end of the work. The music drifts over to the “beyond” and ends in silence....

—English translation by François López-Ferrer and Dr. Scot Buzza

MATTHIAS PINTSCHER is the Music Director of the Ensemble Intercontemporain, the world’s leading contemporary music ensemble founded by Pierre Boulez. In addition to a robust concert season in Paris, he tours extensively with the orchestra throughout Europe, Asia and the United States. In the 2020–21 season, Pintscher also begins a three-season appointment as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra’s Creative Partner. Known equally as one of today’s foremost composers, Pintscher’s works are frequently commissioned and performed by major international orchestras.

In the 2020–21 season, Matthias Pintscher leads a new production of Lohengrin at the Staatsoper Unter den Linden in Berlin directed by Calixto Bieito and returns in the spring to also conduct Wozzeck. He makes debuts with the Oslo Philharmonic, Swedish Radio Symphony and Barcelona

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Symphony. Return invitations this season include the symphony orchestras of Baltimore, Detroit and San Diego, as well as the New World Symphony in Miami, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra and BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

Matthias Pintscher began his musical training in conducting, studying with Pierre Boulez and Peter Eötvös in his early 20s, during which time composing soon took a more prominent role in his life.

Program Notes

GUSTAV MAHLER
Das Lied von der Erde (“The Song of the Earth”)

Das Lied von der Erde (“The Song of the Earth”) was one of the last completed works of Gustav Mahler (b. July 7, 1860, Kalischt, Bohemia; d. May 18, 1911, Vienna). Mahler composed the work from 1908 to 1909, during a very impactful time in his life—shortly after the passing of his eldest daughter Anna Maria, and one year after he was diagnosed with congenital heart disease, which led to his own death only three years later. The premiere took place at the Tonhalle Munich on November 20, 1911, six months after the composer’s death, with his friend Bruno Walter conducting and mezzo-soprano Sara Cahier and tenor William Miller, both American, as soloists. The Orchestra is performing the Cortese arrangement for double winds at these concerts.

In a letter to Walter, Mahler described Das Lied von der Erde as a “song-symphony,” wherein the piece takes the form of a song cycle with the robust instrumentation of a symphony, integrating the two genres. This pioneered a new hybrid form that was repeated by many composers of the 20th century.

Mahler drew his texts from Die chinesische Flöte (“The Chinese Flute”), a collection of Chinese poems translated to German by Hans Bethge. Bethge had adapted his poems from Hans Heilmann’s Chinesische Lyrik, which, in turn, had been adapted from French translations of classical Chinese poetry dating from the Tang Dynasty. While much of Mahler’s inspiration came from these poems, he did alter many of them, usually adding lines to suit a theme he employed often in his music: life is brief and death is all-powerful and inevitable.

Guest Artists

MICHELLE DeYOUNG, mezzo-soprano

Michelle DeYoung appears frequently with many of the world’s leading orchestras and music festivals, as well as with the world’s finest opera houses. Among her many roles, she created The Shaman in Tan Dun’s The First Emperor at The Metropolitan Opera. She made her CSO subscription debut in January 1998, singing Mahler’s Symphony No. 3, which also was recorded for Telarc (Jesús López Cobos conducting); her most recent appearance was May 2015.

Her recording of Kindertotenlieder and Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 with Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony (SFS Media) was awarded the 2003 Grammy Award for Best Classical Album. She has also been awarded 2001 Grammys for Best Classical Album and Best Opera Recording for Les Troyens with Sir Colin Davis and the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO Live).

SEAN PANIKKAR, tenor

An American tenor of Sri Lankan heritage, Sean Panikkar achieved break-out success in his 2018 Salzburger Festspiele debut as Dionysus in Henze’s The Bassarids, and he was critically acclaimed that year in his Los Angeles Opera debut as Gandhi in Philip Glass’ Satyagraha. These concerts mark his CSO debut.

Highly prized as an interpreter of contemporary music on leading international stages, he also has performed numerous times with The Metropolitan Opera and with symphony orchestras across the U.S.

Panikkar is a member of Forte, the operatic tenor group combining voices from different cultures that was created for and debuted on NBC’s America’s Got Talent in 2013 and released albums in 2013 and 2015.

He is an alumnus of San Francisco Opera’s Adler Fellowship and holds degrees in Voice Performance from the University of Michigan.

FOR MORE INFORMATION For more information about the music on this program, including the text and translation for Das Lied von der Erde, and for details about the featured artists and the musicians of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, please visit cincinnatisymphony.org/daslied, or point your phone’s camera at this QR code:
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