

## SPEEDREAD

Asked what prompted his huge 80-minute Second Symphony, Mahler replied that he needed to express himself musically ‘at the point where the dark feelings hold sway’. Anger, fear and longing vie for expression in the first of its five movements, a funeral march in which Mahler ponders questions about life and death and comes, it seems, to a despairing conclusion. The second movement is a kind of minuet recalling youth and lost innocence. Disgust at life’s trivialities characterises the following scherzo. A solo contralto voice enters at this point, expressing in the words of a folk poem a simple confidence in eternal life. The tumultuous finale that follows is filled at first with horror, but there are hopeful signs in the air and the answer to the Symphony’s questions comes at last with the hushed tones of a choir assuring us that we shall rise again. A mighty declaration of Christian faith, ‘I shall die so as to live’, grows from this, and the bells ring out in triumph at the end.

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In Saturday’s concert, the funeral march which opens Mahler’s Symphony is preceded by another elegy, *Stele* (the title means an inscribed memorial column) by the senior Hungarian composer György Kurtág. A slow introduction of intense concentration leads to a central movement of fierce protest followed by uneasy calm, and the work ends in the manner of a solemn procession.

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