

Soprano joins symphony to conclude season tribute to Mahler

By MIKE CHAIKEN
EDITIONS EDITOR

A season-long tribute to composer Gustav Mahler wraps up this weekend as the the Hartford Symphony Orchestra's concludes its Masterworks Series with a performance of the composer's Symphony No. 4 in G Major at the Bushnell in Hartford.

Production notes about the composition provided by the symphony explain, "Its entire mood and structure are built to lead to the finale.. The composer is reported to have said, 'In the first three movements (of the Fourth) there reigns the serenity of a higher realm, a realm strange to us, oddly frightening, even terrifying. In the finale, the child, which in its previous existence belonged to this higher realm, tells us what it all means..."

Soprano Jamilyn Manning-White, who has had guest spots with the symphony previously will be the featured vocalist on the Gustav's Fourth.

The Observer caught up with Jamilyn via email to talk to her about the composition.

Observer: First of all, from the point of a listener, what do you like about Mahler's piece?

Jamilyn: I love his soaring melodies contrasted by exciting and distinct rhythmic passages, and his lush orchestration. There are so many playful motifs that bounce around each movement, once I recognize one I feel a sense of ownership in my listening experience.

O: What do you appreciate most about Mahler as a composer?

J: Mahler's compositional output is considered relatively small, only composing part-time as he was

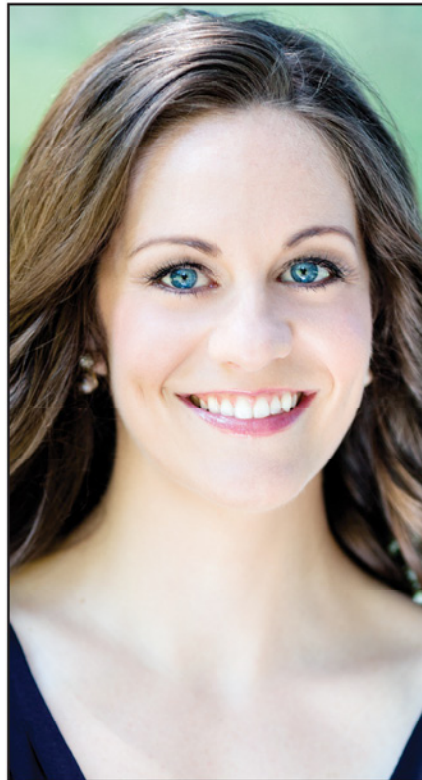
considered one of the world's leading conductors of his time and in high demand. He conducted opera throughout Europe and later became the music director of the Metropolitan Opera and the New York Philharmonic at the turn of the 20th Century. The music he did write is designed for a robust orchestra, operatic soloists, and symphonic choruses. Having such an extensive experience in conducting opera and working closely with singers, there is no wonder why he wrote so intuitively for the voice.

O: The piece takes the listener on a journey. Listening to it, what imagery goes through your head?

J: In the fourth movement, the child first describes the peaceful surroundings in heaven and remarks on how funny the angels sing and dance as Saint Peter watches at the pearly gates. The child simply describes the slaughter of innocent lambs by King Herod and then remarks how all the wine and bread is free. The child marvels of all the fruits, vegetables, and herbs that grow in the heavenly garden and how fun it is to fish and play with a wide assortment of animals. Finally, the child expresses that no music on Earth can compare to the music found here.

O: As a performer, what do you like about the work? What do you try to convey to the audience through your performance?

J: Mahler's fourth symphony is constructed upon a solo song, "Das himmlische Leben" from Des Knaben Wunderhorn, a collection of German poems for children. This would be our English equivalent of



Jamilyn Manning-White is the featured soprano as the Hartford Symphony Orchestra performs Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 4 in G Major at The Bushnell in Hartford this weekend.

nursery rhymes, bedtime stories that fill our imagination by day and excite our dreams by night. There is a joyous, childlike wonder and sense of innocence Mahler captures making this particular symphony

more relatable and meaningful to me.

O: What is the most challenging aspect of the composition as the vocalist on the piece?

J: I find the most chal-

lenging aspect of this piece to not become lured in by its sheer beauty and forget to sing.

O: For the audience, any suggestions on what they should listen for in the Mahler piece?

J: Mahler uses flutes and Christmas bells as part of the "bells theme" throughout the symphony. Listen for them and see what they might represent to you, they're my favorite. Consider how they contrast with other themes you notice, and listen how each theme culminates in the fourth movement.

O: This is not the first time you've performed with the Hartford Symphony?

J: I made my Hartford Symphony debut in December of 2011, Maestro Carolyn Kuan's inaugural season, singing Violetta in a beautifully staged performance of Act IV of La Traviata by Marc Verzatt with Yale Opera. I returned to HSO January of 2014 as a soprano soloist in Mendelssohn's Incidental Music: A Midsummer Night's Dream Op. 61 in collaboration with The Hartford Stage and Chorus Angelicus and Gaudeamus. Both have been thrilling collaborations, excellent musical and dramatic experiences I have cherished ever since.

O: What do you like about the symphony as a musical entity?

J: When I'm preparing music, I use a piano, which is very percussive and limit-

ing in its support to a singer. Singing with an orchestra is like singing on a cloud.

With every rehearsal with an orchestra, without fail, my skin covers with goosebumps and I'm humbled to collaborate with so many gifted musicians united in telling the same story.

O: What do you like about the partnership you've formed with the orchestra?

J: The Hartford Symphony Orchestra is a New England musical gem brilliantly directed by Carolyn Kuan, creatively programmed to reach a wide array of audience ages and interests, no simple task, and has been a standard of musical excellence for decades. I live in New Haven with my husband and beagle and it's wonderful to collaborate with local opera companies and symphonic orchestras. As an artist, I travel where the story is told, and it's gratifying to support the artistic community in a state my husband and I love.

Hartford Symphony Orchestra Masterworks Series, "Mahler's Fourth" continues through Sunday in the Belding Theater at The Bushnell, 166 Capitol Ave. Performances are Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

Tickets start at \$38.50; \$10 for students with ID.

For more information, call (860)987-5900 or www.hartfordsymphony.org

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