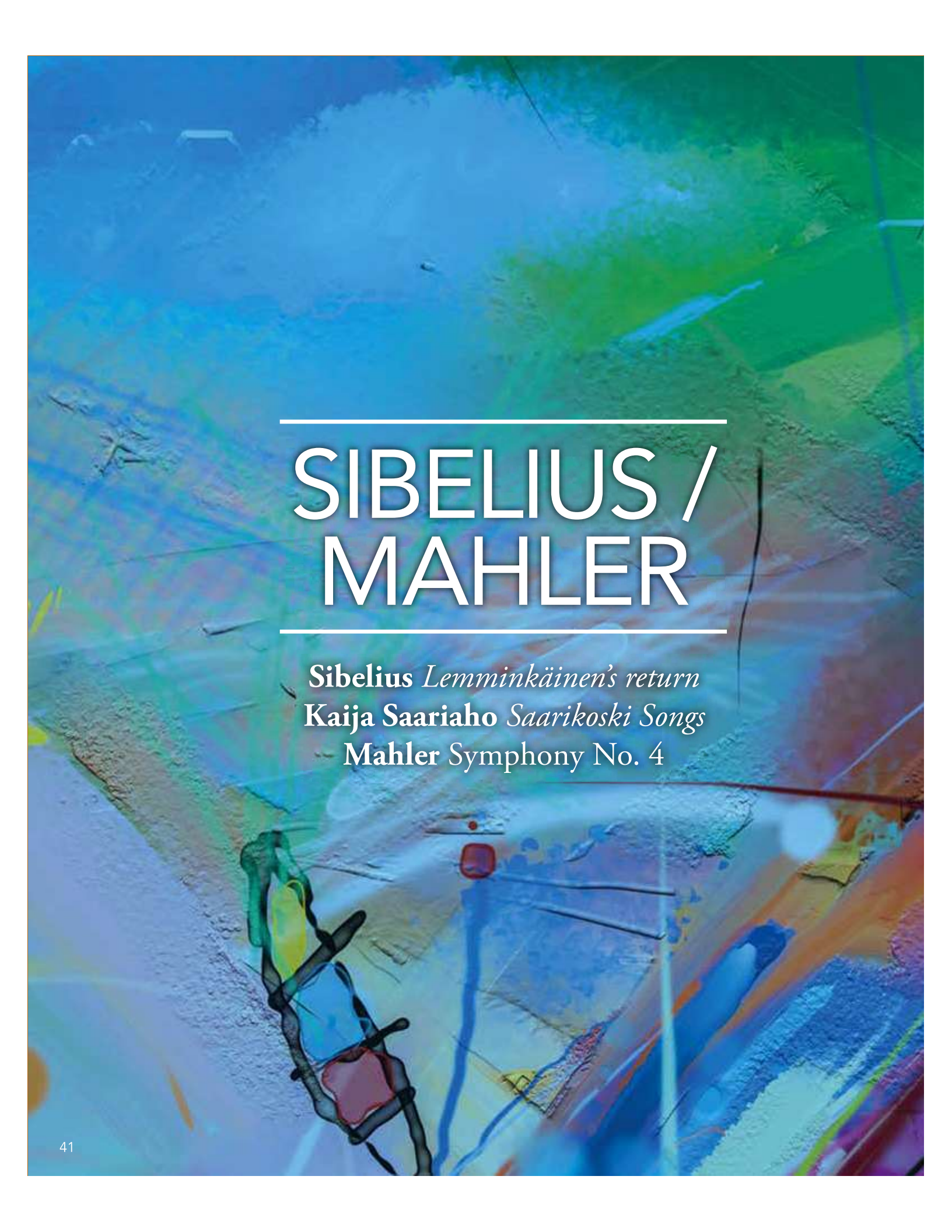




SIBELIUS / MAHLER

Sibelius *Lemminkäinen's return*
Kaija Saariaho *Saarikoski Songs*
Mahler *Symphony No. 4*

Sat.
JAN. 23
at 7:30pm

Sun.
JAN. 24
at 2:30pm

Pikes Peak Center for the Performing Arts

Chloé Dufresne *conductor*
Anu Koms *soprano*

What comes after journey's end? This concert explores the restlessness of the human spirit, especially when confronted by a reality bigger than ourselves. Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen's Return* brings listeners to the end of a hero's tumultuous journey and the task of moving on from adventure to build a new life. Kaija Saariaho's *Saarikoski Songs* poetically dissects how human nature is implicated in the destruction of nature. Mahler's Symphony No. 4 expands upon an innocent worldview: a child's vision of heaven, the people that live there, and the carefree pace of eternal life. Together, these majestic works demand our attention and deeper self-reflection.

Sibelius *Lemminkäinen's Return*

Kaija Saariaho *Saarikoski Songs*

- I. Luonnon Kasvot (But the face of nature is peaceful...)
- II. Jokaisella on tämänsä (Everyone from now on will have their own...)
- III. Kaikki tämä (But we see a bed of grey reeds...)
- IV. Minussa lintu ja käärme (The snake closes its mouth in a bite)
- V. Sumun läpi (The interstitial time petrifies...)

Mahler Symphony No. 4

- I. Bedächtig; nicht eilen (Deliberately. Unhurried – Very leisurely)
- II. In gemächlicher Bewegung; ohne Hast (In a leisurely manner, without haste)
- III. Ruhevoll (Calm)
- IV. Sehr behaglich (Very contentedly)

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SOPRANO

Anu Komsi

Finnish coloratura soprano Anu Komsi has spent more than three decades expanding what her voice type is capable of, commissioning and premiering new works while also reviving forgotten coloratura masterworks for modern audiences. Praised for her precision, musicianship, and fearless range — from Renaissance repertoire to progressive jazz to the most demanding contemporary scores — she has earned a comparison to the great Jenny Lind, only for our own era.

That standing was confirmed in 2021, when she received the Erik Bergman Prize for her international and domestic contributions to the art of singing, following the Finnish Composers' Association's Madetoja Prize in 2020 and a nomination for the Nordic Council Music Prize the same year. Her upcoming seasons take her to La Monnaie in Brussels, Helsinki's Musiikkitalo, the Cité de la Musique in Paris, and the Philharmonie in Cologne.

Komsi made her operatic debut in 1991 in Ligeti's *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* at the Helsinki Festival under Esa-Pekka Salonen, and two years later took Frankfurt Opera by storm as Olympia in Offenbach's *Tales of Hoffmann* — a performance that earned her the nickname "Polarstern" (Pole Star) in the German press.

Across roughly 70 opera roles, she has built a reputation for landmark performances of Zerbinetta, Lulu, Salome, Gilda, Norina, and Stravinsky's *Nightingale*, most recently as the Mother-in-Law in Kaija Saariaho's *Innocence* at Finnish National Opera (2022) and *Semperoper* Dresden (2025). In 2017 she sang the formidable coloratura role of Catherine in the Finnish premiere of Meyerbeer's *L'Étoile du Nord*.

Contemporary music has been her particular calling. George Benjamin composed the soprano role in his opera *Into the Little Hill* specifically for her voice; since its 2006 Paris premiere, she has performed it more than 50 times across Europe and the United States, most recently at the Elbphilharmonie and Wigmore Hall. As Eva in Stockhausen's *Donnerstag aus Licht* (Basel Theatre, 2016), Komsi became the only singer ever to perform the role's massive six-hour part entirely alone rather than sharing it, in a production named Best Opera Production of the Year by Opernwelt. Her performance in John Zorn's *La Machine de l'Être* at New York City Opera drew the description "pyrotechnic grace" from *The New Yorker*, and her turn in Morton Feldman's cult opera at the Salzburg Festival earned her the German press's "Antioper Heldin" — anti-opera heroine.

As a concert soloist, Komsa has appeared with the Vienna, Berlin, and New York Philharmonics, the Boston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and Gewandhaus Orchestra, under conductors including Salonen, Andris Nelsons, Sir Roger Norrington, and longtime collaborator Sakari Oramo. Several major works have been written expressly for her, among them Kaija Saariaho's Saarikoski and Leino song cycles and Esa-Pekka Salonen's *Wing on Wing*.

Her recorded catalog includes several Gramophone Award winners, and a long-running duo with pianist Pia Värri has produced two albums, most recently a complete survey of Saariaho's vocal music with piano. She has performed Kurtág's *Kafka Fragmente* since 1988, recording it first with Oramo and later with violinists including Isabelle Faust and Patricia Kopatchinskaja.

Komsa holds a Master of Music degree from the Sibelius Academy and sings fluently in Finnish, English, Swedish, German, French, and Italian, with repertoire spanning a dozen further languages.

Lemminkäinen's Return

Title: *Lemminkäinen's Return* (from *Four Legends from the Kalevala*, Op. 22)

Duration: Approximately 7 minutes

Composer: Jean Sibelius (Born in Tavestehus (Hämeenlinna) Finland on December 8, 1865; died in Järvenpää, Finland on September 20, 1957)

Work composed: Beginning with material for a Nationalist Finnish opera begun in 1893, Sibelius repurposed some of its music for a suite of four tone poems called *Four Legends from the Kalevala*, Op. 22, (also known as the *Lemminkäinen Suite*) which he completed in 1895. *Lemminkäinen's Return* is the fourth and final tone poem in the Suite. Sibelius made revisions to the Suite twice – in 1897 and in 1939

Work premiered: The entire Suite was premiered on April 13, 1896 in Helsinki with Sibelius conducting

Instrumentation: 2 piccolos, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tambourine, glockenspiel, strings

When Sibelius first came to national recognition in Finland in the 1890's, the country was passionately striving to achieve total independence from its long history of overlordship by Sweden and Russia, and to craft its own national identity. In that pursuit, the Finnish Nationalist movement (calling themselves the *Fennomans* – or, roughly, the Finnish Supporters) launched a contest in 1891 for a Nationalistic opera, written in Finnish, and based on Finland's mythological lore. Sibelius was already aligned with the Nationalist cause and he entered the contest, choosing as his source material

scenes from the *Kalevala*, Finland's epic mythological origin story. The contest allowed five years for the contestants to submit their opera. Sibelius immersed himself in this project between 1893-94, calling his opera *Veneen luominen* (*The Building of the Boat*) based on *Kalevala* stories, but delays and difficulties plagued him. He eventually abandoned the opera, realizing that his talents were best suited to composing purely instrumental music. Thus, in 1895 he turned some of the music he had written for *Veneen luominen* into a suite of four short tone poems for orchestra, entitled the *Four Legends from the Kalevala*, also called the *Lemminkäinen Suite*.

Finland's *Kalevala* tells the origin story of its people from the dawn of their beginnings to the advent of Christianity – an epic tome of some 50 parts (called *Cantos*) comprised of tens of thousands of lines of poetic verse. Central to the *Kalevala* is the power of singing. Sibelius's Suite from that epic tome centers on one of the *Kalevala*'s several main figures, Lemminkäinen, a kind of Don Juan/shaman/action hero. Each of Sibelius's four tone poems in the Suite are loosely based on the cantos-episodes in the *Kalevala* that featured Lemminkäinen: the first, *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of the Island*, describes his cavalier seducing days; the second, *The Swan of Tuonela* – and one of the most popular of the four – focuses on the mysterious and beguiling Swan that guards Tuonela, the Island of the Dead; in the third tone poem, *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela*, while in pursuing yet another amorous conquest, Lemminkäinen has been dared to kill the Tuonela Swan. But as he attempts this deed, he's discovered, murdered and dismembered, and then thrown into Tuonela's watery domain until Lemminkäinen's mother fishes his body out, stitches him back together, and magically resurrects him. In Sibelius's fourth tone poem, *Lemminkäinen's Return*, which is performed tonight, the reanimated hero returns from his amorous and sometimes gory adventures to reunite with his family. Although Sibelius combined the four works into a suite, each tone poem is essentially a self-encapsulated work, suitable for independent performance, which is how they are typically programmed.

Lemminkäinen's Returns begins with an accent in the horns and strings and timpani – a startle – but which quickly recedes into a soft and busy sound bed of rumbling tremolos. Sibelius marks this work to be played *Allegro con fuoco* (*poco e poco piu energico*), (Fast and fiery – with more energy little by little). Two bassoons quickly call out after one another, echo-like, setting up two small rhythmic and melodic motives that will pervade the entire tone poem. Within a few seconds, already there's a feeling of swashbuckling adventure. Additional instruments are added bit by bit, usually entering with a version of that opening motive, and always, underneath, Sibelius continues the busy sound bed of tremolo energy, from the timpani, or the bass drum, or the strings, from quick notes pattering at high speed in the winds, or in combinations, like a boiling energy. The entire palette of sounds, too, with open fifths often droning in the background, and much of the orchestra often playing in their

lower registers, Sibelius somehow magically evokes the mysterious, cold, and vast Northern climes where Lemminkäinen is hurtling by horseback through a forbidding but beautiful landscape.

At about three minutes, the orchestra has quieted some, though still hyper-active, as if the hero is having a few nostalgic recollections of his exploits, and the glockenspiel pings out a sequence of ethereally beautiful notes. But home is where Lemminkäinen is headlong bound, and he has a head filled with heroism. The music becomes increasingly active – in another minute, the brass begin to break out in brief fanfares. As various motives in the winds, brass, and strings begin to grow and collide, at about six minutes the strings begin an ostinato rhythm that sounds like a full-on horse gallop, with long strides, now marked *Presto* (very fast). The music builds with purpose until the very last bars, and with thundering timpani, the music delivers Lemminkäinen home in a blaze of valiant glory.

Saarikoski-laulut (Saarikoski Songs)

Title: Saarikoski-laulut (Saarikoski Songs) for Soprano and Orchestra

Duration: Approximately 15 minutes

Composer: Kaija Anneli Saariaho (Born in Helsinki, Finland on October 14, 1952; died in Paris, France on June 2, 2023)

Work composed: The first song of (what is now) the set of five Saarikoski Songs was written in 2013 for Finnish soprano Anu Komsa and piano. The composer added additional songs to the set over several more years, and in 2020, the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra co-commissioned that the set of five songs to be recast for orchestra and voice. The song-cycle is dedicated to Anu Komsa

World premiere: The first performance of this orchestral version took place on February 24, 2022 with soprano Anu Komsa as the soloist and Andris Nelsons conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra

Instrumentation: solo soprano, flute, alto flute, piccolo, oboe, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, 2 horns, trumpet, percussion: [xylophone, marimba, crotales, suspended cymbals, triangle, tam-tam, wood blocks, wood chimes, guiro, glass chimes, tambourine, small bell, snare drum, frame drum, bass drum], timpani (with large cymbal and temple bowl), celesta, strings

Saarikoski-laulut (Saarikoski Songs)

- I. Luonnon Kasvot (But the face of nature is peaceful...)
- II. Jokaisella on tämänsä (Everyone from now on will have their own...)
- III. Kaikki tämä (But we see a bed of grey reeds...)
- IV. Minussa lintu ja käärme (The snake closes its mouth in a bite)
- V. Sumun läpi (The interstitial time petrifies...)

When Finnish composer Kaija Saariaho was a little girl, she complained to her parents that her pillow kept singing to her and wouldn't let her sleep. Eventually she realized that the music she was hearing was being created in her head – just the beginning of the mesmerizing and beautiful sounds that she would create as she grew to become one of the world's most admired modern composers. Saariaho began her studies at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki, Finland and then gravitated first to Darmstadt, Germany, a hotbed of the newest of contemporary music, and then to Paris in 1982 to study at the prestigious IRCAM Institute where bold new music-making was being done with the aid of electronics – computers, tape recorders, and the like. Added to this formal experimentation and creativity was Saariaho's unique form of *synesthesia* – a perceptual condition that triggers multiple senses, such as perceiving colors while hearing musical pitches. As her composing skills matured, Saariaho also began experimenting with a compositional method called "spectral music" – an approach that uses *sound spectra* (the acoustical properties of sound), as a starting point for composing. Later, she explored incorporating natural sounds, in their mysteriously uncanny logic, as well as her heritage and unique sonics of the Finnish language. As Saariaho's list of compositions grew, so did her reputation, captivating audiences around the world, winning countless awards and being commissioned and performed by the world's greatest orchestras and musicians. By 2019, a composer's poll in BBC Music Magazine ranked Saariaho as the world's "greatest living composer." Her unexpected death from cancer in 2023 left an admiring music world reeling.

In 2013, the extremely talented Finnish soprano (and tonight's vocal soloist), Anu Komsa, asked composer Saariaho to set Finnish poet Pentti Saarikoski's poem titled *Luonnon kasvot* ("The face of nature") to music as a song for soprano and piano. The poet for this song, Pentti Saarikoski (1937 – 1983), was a larger-than-life celebrity in Finnish literature and society during his short life. His *Luonnon kasvot* was one of the poems in his 1973 poetry volume, *Alue* ("The District") – a set of distressed ruminations by the author about life as he saw it then, and contemplations about a beloved forest that was being decimated for new apartments. Saarikoski's *Alue* poems are reflective and marvels of potent words, but generally rather bleak. After Saariaho composed her first song from that volume in 2013, over the next seven years she set four additional songs, one by one, to create a five-song cycle called *Saarikoski Songs*. And in 2020, the entire set was co-commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra to be recast for soprano Anu Komsa and a smallish orchestra. In appreciation, the composer dedicated the songs to Anu Komsa.

The reimagining of the musical setting from piano to orchestra opened up Saariaho's color palette greatly, and allowed her to create wonderfully new and different sounds. In doing so, she annotated the orchestral parts with many instructions for the instrumentalists regarding (modern) "extended" playing techniques. Some of these techniques will be seen, many

heard, others disappearing into Saariaho's magical spectral world of sounds. Most challenging may be the demands on the solo soprano, all of them executed with jaw-dropping skill from Komsí. The Songs are challenging of every participant on stage, too, as they create a surreal world of colors and haunted beauty, sometimes even blurring the difference between instrument and voice, all crafted in Saariaho's extraordinary alchemy of making sound feel, somehow, visible.

The first song, *Luonnon kasvot* ("The face of nature"), begins in an air of magical quiet, and strangeness. Pings and swishes emanate from metallic percussion instruments, a flute softly bends a pitch, woodwinds and strings burble quietly, some of them with slow glissandos between notes, others trill, everyone in a hush. Saariaho is creating a ghost of the natural world, where birds *once* sang, and the trees *once* whispered, but which now seem only to be memories. The soprano joins in vocalizing on the vowel "Ah." Immediately, this vocalizing blossoms into a wide, high-pitched trill, as Saariaho said: "[Saarikoski's] text is complemented by abstract bird-like vocalizations." A particularly chilling moment occurs at about four-and-a-half minutes as the soprano sings the line "*Tuulessa kuuluu...*" ("In the wind can be heard the song of birds who died in the extinction"). It's a lyrical moment, but it devolves into a solo timpano tapping and ebbing away, as though the very last of something beautiful was trampled and left behind. The ending bars then conjure up something even more haunting – the lower strings quietly glissando several times upwards and downwards in the softest of dynamics, creating a sonic scene of near unbearable solitude, as the wind drifts over a forest that is no more, in search of friends that are gone.

The second song, *Jokaisella on tämänsä* ("Everyone from now on will have their own"), features vocal virtuosity and a kaleidoscope of instrumental colors. The text is delivered with animation, occasionally ratcheting into anger – typical of the poet Saarikoski's radical pronouncements – of a society that no longer sees itself as a community, or as a whole, smothered by individual needs. The music surges and stops, surges and fragments, ending with a loud and angry tone cluster in the low strings and low winds.

The next song, *Kaikki tämä* ("But we see a bed of grey reeds"), is calm and quiet. The strings and winds begin by constructing large, gentle chords, each note played by a particular instrument, holding it, while other instruments stack their individual pitches upon them. The soprano sings with an atypical lyricism for this song-cycle, and it's beautiful and dreamlike. A particularly effective sound is made at about thirty seconds as a "large groom brush (not metal or plastic)" is swished around the head of a large bass drum, creating the sound of a soft wind. Despite the text's repeated use of the ostensibly joyful "*Ja iloitsemme*" ("We rejoice"), it appears to be a forced positivism – this movement is a slow keening. One breathtaking moment occurs at about two minutes, as Saariaho paints a deeply soul-singed sorrow in



Kaija Anneli Saariaho

music to text – the orchestra seems to lose all its blood and fades out as the soprano finishes the phrase "*Kaikki tämä on tapahtunut hiljattain*" ("All of this has happened recently") – the conclusion of several lines which tells us that everything in this natural place is dead, and the narrator lingers with pain over its recent destruction. At the very end of this song, you can hear one of Saariaho's "extended" string techniques, the *vertical trill*, in the upper violins – which oscillates between a normal pitch and its harmonic – with bone-chilling effect.

The fourth song, *Minussa lintu ja käärme* ("In me the bird and the snake"), Saariaho focuses with laser-like intensity on the pitch of A. The entire, very brief, movement hangs on to this pitch throughout and from nearly every instrument, beginning with the brass and timpani, and then repeated obsessively by the marimba, and so on. The pitch moves throughout the orchestra in different octaves and instruments, and circles around, illustrating this single pitch's diversity of timbres as it changes with various instruments. This is an important aspect of Saariaho's *spectral* explorations, but here, the technique brings up something more – over the sonic changes of this one pitch spinning through the orchestra, the soprano sings Saarikoski's poem in a kind of recitative style, but with a biting delivery, at times, even allowing her voice to slip into a scream. All of this illuminates a duality of human nature, as both Appreciator and Destroyer, the Bird and the Snake – as shown/heard by the same pitch A in its many capacities.

The final song, *Sumun läpi* ("Through the mist"), comes from a very short, two-line poem. For two minutes before the soprano enters, the orchestra creates a most extraordinary soundscape. Beginning with the timpani, bass drum, and string basses, Saariaho evokes timelessness and ominousness, with strangely beautiful sounds that would seem to be coming from the middle of the Earth, melting and solidifying simultaneously. When the soprano begins, we hear what perhaps might be the most "operatic" singing in the song cycle, but alongside her the orchestra's sounds begin to float and morph with glissandi and other techniques evocative of the "mists" in the text, like watching clouds continually renew and decay. As the song begins to end, the soprano vocalizes on the vowel "Ah" as she had done in the very beginning of the first song, "*The face of nature*," and then the orchestra diminishes and melts, congealing into a high-pitched A, pinged out in the celeste and a crotale (a brass disc struck by a mallet), left to vibrate into complete and infinite silence.

Symphony No. 4

Title: Symphony No. 4

Duration: Approximately 50 minutes

Composer: Gustav Mahler (Born in Kalischt, Bohemia (then part of the Austrian Empire, now considered Jihlava in the Czech Republic) on July 7, 1860; died in Vienna, Austria on May 18, 1911)

Work composed: The song, *The Heavenly Life*, of the finale was written in 1892; it was then considered for one of the movements of the colossal *Third Symphony* (1896), and then found its place as the finale to the *Fourth*. Mahler then created the preceding three movements of the Symphony to lead up to this song-finale, completing the whole work in 1900

World premiere: Mahler himself conducted the premiere with the Kaim Orchestra at the Kaim-Saal on November 25, 1901 in Munich. The finale was sung by the much-celebrated soprano, Margarete Michalek

Instrumentation: soprano soloist (4th movement only), 4 flutes, 2 piccolos, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, Eb clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, sleigh bells, tam-tam, glockenspiel, harp, strings

Symphony No. 4

- I. Bedächtig. Nicht eilen – Recht gemächlich (Deliberately. Unhurried – Very leisurely)
- II. In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast (In a leisurely manner, without haste)
- III. Ruhevoll (Calm)
- IV. Sehr behaglich (Very contentedly)

Mahler's first three *Symphonies* were created in a kind of continuing storyline – beginning with the *First*, the "*Titan*" (1888), depicting an archetypal hero's suffering, triumph, and

death, to his *Second*, the "*Resurrection*" (1894), exploring the aftermath of the deceased Hero, and then the *Third* (1896), which contemplates the metaphysical existence of God as perceived from Earth, with its subtitles for each movement – such as "*What the Animals Tell Me*" and "*What the Angels Tell Me*." The lengthy *Third Symphony* has six movements, but Mahler originally included a seventh movement that he subtitled "*Heavenly Life*" (also titled "*What the Child Tells Me*"), but he eventually saved out that movement and instead used it as the finale of his *Fourth Symphony* (1900). With the four *Symphonies*' through-storyline and sharing of musical themes, the *Fourth Symphony* was, as Mahler told a friend, the conclusion to a "perfectly self-contained tetralogy." Even with all of this heady life-death infatuation that Mahler focuses on in these *Symphonies*, they're so rich in lyrical melodies, exquisite and inventive in orchestral color, and filled with moments of sheer tenderness and spine-shaking power, that his music invariably touches us in some profound way.

When the *Fourth* was premiered in Munich in 1901, its opening sleigh bells motif and the second movement's curiously tuned violin solo puzzled many, not to mention the profound oddity of the soprano's song about a child's view of heaven in the fourth movement. Despite its generally poorly received premiere, the *Fourth* soon gained its champions, and indeed, many listeners have become beguiled by Mahler's symphonies by first falling in love with his *Fourth* – the only of his nine *Symphonies* that plays under an hour and so uncharacteristically light-hearted.

The theme-idea for the *Fourth* had its initial genesis in the poem *Der Himmel hängt voll Geigen* ("Heaven hangs full of violins") which Mahler found in an anthology of old German folk poems called *Das Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn). The poem tells about a child's blissful delight with feasting, playing, and singing in heaven, and in 1892, Mahler set it to music (with a different title, *Das himmlische Leben* – "*The Heavenly Life*") within a set of songs. A decade later, after deciding this song would be the finale to his *Fourth*, Mahler then created the entire Symphony around it and leading up to it with three preceding movements: the first movement as a view of the innocent "Child" on earth; the second, a scene conjuring Death as a street fiddler luring the Child into its grasp; the third, the Child's death and transfiguration into heaven; and the fourth being this recast song in which the Child sings of "*The Heavenly Life*."

The first movement begins with a brief introduction of four flutes and the clarinets gently chirping above the unexpected sound of softly jingling sleigh bells, which quickly leads to a lovely, pastoral theme in the violins – it's likely one of the most arresting and intoxicating openings in the symphonic literature. The startling yet comfortable sound that the sleigh bells create is a shrewd metaphor for the coexistence of the human with the supernatural, and will eventually serve as a tonal link between the first and last movements. This first movement's gentle atmosphere, even with its several anxious

moments, was described by Mahler as the Child contemplating the deep blue sky, which was the floor of heaven, so appealing and yet so daunting. One way that Mahler captures this is with some breathtaking orchestration – for example, a wonderful moment occurs at about six-and-a-half minutes: As the basses pluck away gently but with purpose, the four flutes play an enchanting melody in unison that captures a sense of soaring above the clouds in that deep blue clearness. Amidst the movement's bucolic nature, however, a massive climax arrives, and out of it, a conspicuously dark fanfare emerges in the trumpets (at about four minutes later) – a motive that will become a defining theme in Mahler's next symphony, his *Fifth* (1902), but here only forebodes of a darkness to come – Death. When the sleigh bells announce the closing section of the movement a little later, the earlier themes are repeated slightly differently – already the transition from earth to heaven has begun – and the music then builds quickly to a joyful, but understated, ending.

The second movement plays the symphonic role of a scherzo, but in an oddly taut yet slowed down pace. It opens with a solo horn darkly tolling like distant bells, cleverly metamorphosing from the first movement's sleigh bells. The horn is answered by the chirping woodwinds from the opening of the first movement. Even at its slower pace, however, the music creates a disturbed atmosphere which Mahler described to as a *"danse macabre ... mystical, confused and uncanny, making your hair stand on end."* Originally he called the movement *"Freund Hein spielt auf"* (Friend Death Performs) alluding to Death playing his fiddle to lure the Child to the afterlife. To accent Death's otherworldliness, the concertmaster must play several violin solos with each of its strings tuned a whole tone higher, a technique called *scodatura*, mimicking the jarring tones of a street fiddler. The two *Trios*, contrasting middle sections, are *ländler*s, an old Viennese country dance form, that represents the Child blithely dancing into Death's embrace. After the timpani tap out a rhythm firmly escorting the child into Death's hands, the ending closes rather light-heartedly, signaling that death may not be as mean-spirited as we might have thought.

The slow and meditative third movement is one of Mahler's most beautiful. It's a loose set of variations on two themes, and Mahler said that the movement was inspired by his "vision of a tombstone on which was carved an image of the departed, with folded arms, in eternal sleep," and later told a friend that its music "laughed and cried at the same time." The movement opens with only the strings playing a theme that seems to elude time, draped in an ineffable peacefulness. Underneath, the basses play a slow and quiet pizzicato accompaniment, simple and persistent, which will act as the anchor holding everything in the movement together. All of this is the metamorphosis of the Child's spirit as it escapes its earthly bonds – with passages of yearning and anxiety, always receding back into the opening theme's serenity. At about 18 minutes, the music hovers at the cusp of heaven's cerulean gates, and the transformation at last occurs with the *Symphony's* loudest moment – the strings make a startling

leap upwards and then the bass drum rents a terrific gash (marked to be played at *ffff* – very loudly) into heaven's blue floor. With massive blows, the timpani pounds out the bass's pizzicato motif and the brass foretell the themes to come in the fourth movement, in a moment both majestic and terrifying. The transformation then calms, ending the movement in nearly indescribable quiescence, until, at last, harmonics in the strings give us our first, fresh breath and view of the heavenly realm.

The fourth movement, as discussed earlier, is the moment for which this entire *Symphony* was created, like the exhibit around which an entire museum has been built. And it begins with a calmness and sweetness that tells us we have arrived, as the clarinet and harp open with a delightfully care-free tune with light, skipping rhythms. The movement is set out in song form by a soprano who speaks as the newly arrived Child in heaven, with each new verse announced by the sleigh bells and flute motive that began the first movement. The song's text is the Child's description of life in heaven and is almost befuddlingly ultra-naïve. Reportedly, heaven is joyful and restful, filled with song and play, but filled with gluttony and slaughtering of animals for the pleasures of an infinite banquet. From its very premiere in 1902, the poem in this last movement created a fair amount of perplexity. In this regard, we should know that the source material – the 100-year-old collection of German folk poems (in Mahler's time) – portrayed tales that were imbued with simplicity as well as frightfulness, much like the original Grimms' Fairy Tales could be gruesome. In any case, the poem attempts to make the case that even St. Ursula, the martyr who suffered one of the greatest butcheries in Christian lore (who was massacred by pagans along with her 11,000 virgin handmaids), comfortably laughs and lingers in heaven's joys, no matter what sacrifices were made. In the end, Mahler never really explained the poem's curious contrasts, nor his own obsession with setting this particular poem to music. But despite some of the text's bizarreness, there is no denying the music's overarching, infinite beauty. As the *Symphony* closes in its sublime softness, the harp gently plucks in its lowest register, sewing up the rent in heaven's floor that was torn open by the bass drum in the third movement, where, above heaven's mesmeric blue, the Child will forever sing.

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CONDUCTOR

Chloé Dufresne

See page 5 for biography



Chloé Dufresne

Music Director

"Chloé Dufresne endeared herself with a rare combination of humility and authority... Chloé took control of the piece, telling its story, picking at its colours, literally 'conducting' its magic."

- Andrew Mellor, Gramophone.

With her clear technique, calm authority and imaginative palette, Chloé Dufresne has made her mark as a conductor only a few years since graduating from the Sibelius Academy. In 2025, she was appointed Music Director of the Colorado Springs Philharmonic and serves as Associate Artist of the Orchestre National de Bretagne and Artistic Director of Orchestre Ostinato.

A background in singing and choral conducting has led Dufresne naturally to opera, and in the 2024–25 season she conducted *Carmen* at Theater Magdeburg, *Orphée aux enfers* with Opéra national du Capitole de Toulouse, *L'Elisir d'amore* with Opéra national de Lorraine, and a new production of Leonard Evers' *Humanoid* at Semperoper Dresden. Earlier productions include *Don Giovanni*, *Norma*, *Albert Herring* and Offenbach's *Pomme d'Api* for Opéra Rouen, Opéra de Toulon, Opéra de Nice and Opéra National de Lorraine, as well as a Bayreuth production of Wagner's *The Ring for children* at the Helsinki Festival. Alongside her commitments in Colorado, this season Dufresne conducts Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz, Stuttgarter Philharmoniker, Staatsorchester Rheinische Philharmonie Koblenz and Kuopio Symphony Orchestra.

In France, she returns to Orchestre National de Bretagne, Opéra Grand Avignon (with Offenbach's *La Belle Hélène*) and Opéra national de Paris for Mozart's *La Finta Giardiniera*. As well as specializing in core repertoire by composers such as Debussy, Tchaikovsky, Stravinsky, Dvořák and Beethoven, Dufresne is a strong advocate for new music and won a prize for her interpretation of music by Camille Pepin at the Besançon Conducting Competition.

Dufresne studied viola, singing and choral conducting before completing her Masters in conducting from the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in 2020, where her teachers included Atso Almila, Sakari Oramo and Alain Altinoglu. She was a Conducting Fellow at the 2022 Lucerne Festival and a Dudamel Fellow with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.