

Atlanta
Symphony
Orchestra



Robert Spano
Music Director
Donald Runnicles
Principal Guest Conductor
Michael Krajewski
Principal Pops Conductor

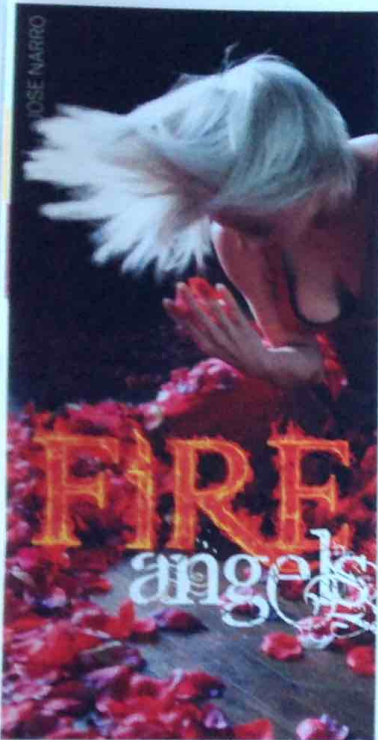
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STRAVINSKY:

*The Rite
of Spring*

MAR 13/15/16

ENCORE
ATLANTA



Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

Robert Spano, Music Director
Donald Runnicles, Principal Guest Conductor

Delta Classical Series Concert

Concerts of Thursday, March 20, and Friday, March 21, 2014, at 8:00pm

Robert Spano, Conductor
Jessica Rivera, Soprano
Stuart Skelton, Tenor

MARK GREY (b. 1967)
Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels),
 for Soprano, Tenor, and Orchestra (2013) 42 MIN

- Overture
- Scene I: *Invocation*
- Scene II: *Voyage*
- Scene III: *Transformation/Aria*
- Scene IV: *Restoration*

Jessica River, Soprano
 Stuart Skelton, Tenor

World Premiere. Commissioned by Music Director Robert Spano and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

INTERMISSION 20 MIN

GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)
Symphony No. 4 in G Major (1900) 57MIN

- I. *Bedächtigt. Nicht eilen*
 (Deliberate. Unhurried)
- II. *In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast*
 (In measured tempo. Unhurried)
- III. *Ruhevoll (Calm)*
- IV. *Sehr behaglich (At ease)*
 Jessica Rivera, Soprano

English surtitles by Ken Meltzer.

The use of cameras or recording devices during the concert is strictly prohibited. Please be kind to those around you and silence your mobile phone and other hand-held devices.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Delta Classical Series is presented by:



The Atlanta School of Composers and the performance of new works are presented by:



KEN MELTZER, ASO Program Annotator | Ken's in-depth program notes, detailed musical analysis, and listening samples can be found online: aso.org/encore

Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels),
 for Soprano, Tenor, and Orchestra (2013)

MARK GREY was born in Evanston, Illinois, on January 1, 1967. These are the world premiere performances of *Fire Angels*, for Soprano, Tenor, and Orchestra. *Fire Angels* is scored for soprano and tenor solo, piccolo, flute, two oboes, English horn, clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, four horns, trumpet in D, two trumpets in C, two trombones, bass trombone, tuba, timpani, chimes, vibraphone, claves, glockenspiel, xylophone, ratchet, castanets, triangle, high temple block, large tam-tam, snare drum, medium and low congas, bass drum, harp, celeste, and strings.

These are the first ASO Classical Subscription Performances.

Ātash Sorushān (Fire Angels) is a collaboration between composer Mark Grey and librettist Niloufar Talebi. Mark Grey's music has been performed throughout the world. As a sound designer, Mark Grey has collaborated with such artists as John Adams, Steve Reich, Philip Glass, and the Kronos Quartet. London-born author Niloufar Talebi has earned international acclaim as a writer, award-winning translator, and multidisciplinary artist.

Fire Angels originated as a composition for soprano, piano, and chamber orchestra, commissioned by Carnegie Hall and Cal Performances, and through Meet the Composer's *Commissioning Music/USA* program, to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks. The premiere took place at Zankel Hall, Carnegie Hall, New York, on March 29, 2011, with soprano Jessica Rivera,

pianist Molly Morkoski, and Ensemble Meme, conducted by Donato Cabrera.

The Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Robert Spano commissioned a new orchestral version of *Fire Angels*. In the original chamber version, the soprano solo embodies both Mana and Ahsha. In the orchestral version, the role of Mana remains with the soprano, while a tenor sings Ahsha's music. The orchestral version adds an opening Overture and omits the electronic soundscapes of the original. Mr. Grey dedicated the work to Robert Spano.

This work is sung in three languages – English, Persian, and Avestan.

The Story of Ātash Sorushān

The "Fire Angels" of Niloufar Talebi's libretto are Mana and Ahsha — the Fire Angels of Life and Truth. While both characters are creations of Ms. Talebi, each has a profound connection to Iran's Zoroastrian tradition. The power of fire is a leitmotif that runs throughout the Zoroastrian faith. "Mana" is the Persian word for all-encompassing divine life. "Ahsha" is a term for truth/existence in the ancient Iranian language, Avestan.

Ahsha and Mana's horrific initial encounter, and their resulting love, is a reminder not only of the events of September 11, 2001, but of that singular tragedy's transformative potential. Ms. Talebi's libretto and Mark Grey's music also invoke the tradition of such epic operatic love stories as Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) and Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* (1926).

After the orchestral Overture, Scene 1: *Invocation*, introduces us to the characters of Mana and Ahsha. Both revel in their otherworldly powers. Ahsha departs in search of Mana.

In Scene 2: *Voyage*, Ahsha, riding on “the blasting wings of Phoenix,” hurtles toward Mana. She describes their apocalyptic encounter:

We are a roaring hurricane
Falling to our knees
A vortex of sound and flesh
In the bright blue morning

Now, Ahsha and Mana no longer view each other as rivals (Scene 3: *Transformation/ Aria*), but rather, as lovers:

From these ashes
Together we beat
A new ardent heart
And we burn
Luminous with
Love’s fire.

In the final Scene (*Restoration*), Mana and Ahsha celebrate the restoration of the world. The finale includes a portion of the Avestan “Hymns to the Earth” and, in the closing measures, a verse by the Iranian poet Sohrab Sepehri (1928-1980):

Our work is not to discover
The secret of the rose
Our work is perhaps
To run after the song of truth
In the distance between the lotus
And the Century.

(English translation from the Persian by Niloufar Talebi)

Symphony No. 4 in G Major (1900)

GUSTAV MAHLER was born in Kaliště, Bohemia, on July 7, 1860, and died in Vienna, Austria, on May 18, 1911. The first performance of the Symphony No. 4 took place in Munich, Germany, on November 25, 1901, with Margarethe Michalek, soprano, and the composer conducting the Kaim Orchestra. The Symphony No. 4 is scored for soprano solo, two

piccolos, four flutes, three oboes, English horn, E-flat clarinet, three clarinets, bass clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, orchestra bells, sleigh bells, suspended cymbal, triangle, tam-tam, harp, and strings.

First ASO Classical Subscription

Performances: March 16, 1954, Sally Cramer, Soprano, Henry Sopkin, Conductor.

Most Recent ASO Classical Subscription

Performances: January 23, 26 and 27, 2008, Heidi Grant Murphy, Soprano, Roberto Abbado, Conductor.

ASO Recording: Telarc-80499, Frederica von Stade, Mezzo-soprano, Yoel Levi, Conducting.

‘A manner more furious than friendly’

Gustav Mahler completed his Fourth Symphony in the summer of 1900. The premiere took place in Munich on November 25, 1901, with the composer leading the Kaim Orchestra. Before the opening performance, several members of the orchestra approached Mahler and confessed “they hadn’t been able to make head or tail of the work but would do their best to change their minds the following day.”

The audience and critics demonstrated a like sense of confusion. Everyone seemed to anticipate that Mahler’s Fourth would, in the spirit of his Second and Third Symphonies, be an epic, dramatic piece. They were decidedly taken aback by the apparent naïveté and simplicity of Mahler’s new score. Boos mingled with—and sometimes overwhelmed—demonstrations of support for Mahler’s latest Symphony. At the conclusion of the performance, Mahler took his bows “in a manner more furious

than friendly.”

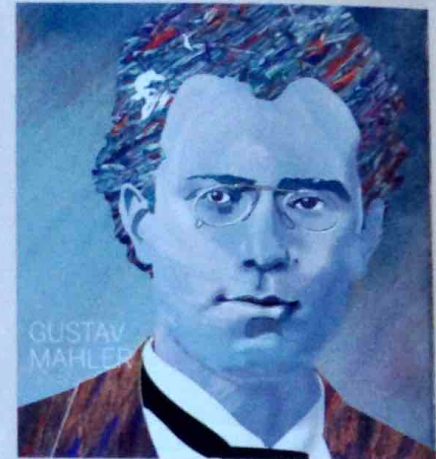
Nevertheless, the Fourth Symphony, with its abundant lyricism and relative brevity, quickly proved to be among the most accessible and popular of Mahler’s Symphonies. Today, each of Mahler’s Symphonies has received its due, both in concert performances and recordings. Still, the genial lyricism and grace of the Fourth, sometimes called Mahler’s “Pastorale” Symphony, continue to accord the work a favored status. Further, close analysis reveals that beneath the seemingly naïve exterior of the Fourth Symphony is an extraordinarily intricate, sophisticated, and unified work.

Mahler on his Fourth Symphony

The following are some of Mahler’s comments regarding the nature and meaning of his Fourth Symphony:

What I had in mind here was unbelievably difficult to do. Imagine the uniform blue of the skies, which is more difficult to paint than all changing and contrasting shades. This is the fundamental mood of the whole. Only sometimes it darkens and becomes ghostly, gruesome. But heaven itself is not so darkened, it shines on in an eternal blue. Only to us it suddenly seems gruesome, just as on the most beautiful day in the woods, flooded with light, we are often gripped by panic and fear. The Scherzo (second movement) is mystical, confused and eerie so that your hair will stand on end. But in the following Adagio you will soon see that things were not so bad—everything is resolved.

In the final movement (“The Heavenly Life”), although already belonging to this higher world, the child explains



how everything is meant to be.

The Symphony is in four movements. The first (*Bedächtigt. Nicht eilen*) opens with a “sleigh bell” motif, followed by a *grazioso* dotted-rhythm figure, introduced by the first violins. Both play crucial roles in the finale. Bruno Walter, the great German conductor and Mahler disciple, described the second movement scherzo (*In gemächlicher Bewegung. Ohne Hast*) as “*Freund Hein spielt zum Tanz auf*” (“Friend Death is striking up the Dance”). Death fiddles rather strangely; his playing sends us up to heaven.” According to Mahler’s friend, Natalie Bauer-Lechner, the composer referred to the third movement (*Ruhevoll*) as “‘The Smiling of St. Ursula’ and said that at the time he had a childhood image of his mother’s face in mind, recalling how she had laughed through grieving and had smiled through tears, for she had suffered unendingly yet had always lovingly resolved and forgiven everything.” In the finale (*Sehr behaglich*), a soprano sings Mahler’s setting of the poem *Das himmlische Leben* (*The Heavenly Life*).