

Esa-Pekka Salonen makes his debut with the MCO in Ferrara, performing the Italian premiere of his violin concerto and Mahler's 1st Symphony

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On 12 March 2010, the Mahler Chamber Orchestra will perform its first concert with Finnish conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen in its Italian residence Ferrara. The programme comprises Gustav Mahler's 1st symphony and Salonen's own Violin Concerto, composed 2009. The soloist will be Leila Josefowicz, to whom the work is dedicated and who premiered the piece with great success in Los Angeles in April 2009.

The evening will begin with Mahler's 1st Symphony. Musicologist Paul Bekker once wrote that Mahler's 1st Symphony is the composer's "first-born symphony, but not a beginner's work." Indeed, the characteristic Mahler sound and the idiosyncrasies of his artistic vision are easily recognizable – the convergence between symphony and song, the collage-like incorporation of differing musical idioms, the extreme intensity and variety of the expression and the discontinuous use of form are some of the most noteworthy. The 1st Symphony achieved its fame in large part due to its third movement, in which Mahler used the canon "Brother Jacob" ("Frère Jacques") in such an alienating way that this light-hearted folk song in major becomes an eerie danse macabre in minor.

Esa-Pekka Salonen's Violin Concerto was premiered in Los Angeles under the baton of the composer on 9 April 2009, about a year before the MCO's concert in Ferrara. The Los Angeles Times reported that the cheers for the concerto were rapturous. The concerto consists of four movements with the titles "Mirage", "Pulse I", "Pulse II" and "Adieu". In the program notes to the premiere, Salonen wrote the following about the concerto: "I decided to cover as wide a range of expression as I could imagine over the four movements of the Concerto: from the virtuosic and flashy to the aggressive and brutal, from the meditative and static to the nostalgic and autumnal. Leila Josefowicz turned out to be a fantastic partner in this process. She knows no limits, she knows no fear, and she was constantly encouraging me to go to places I was not sure I would dare to go."

Esa-Pekka Salonen is not only an internationally renowned conductor, but also a composer whose works are performed worldwide. At the beginning of the 2008/09 season, the Finn became Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor of the Philharmonia Orchestra in London, after completing his term as Music Director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic in summer 2009.

Violinist Leila Josefowicz, who is just now entering her thirties, has already won the heart of audiences across the world with her fresh and honest approach to the violin repertoire and her dynamic, virtuosic playing. The Canadian is a passionate advocate for new music, and her dedication is reflected in her programming and her commitment to premiering new works. Josefowicz's debut in Carnegie hall at 16 was followed by a debut recording of the Tchaikovsky and Sibelius concertos for Philips Classics. Since then, she has performed with many of the best-known orchestras and conductors. This concert will be her debut with the MCO.

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra (MCO), with its unusual structure, internationality and outstanding quality, is an ensemble unique to the present time. Its organisation and method of operation make it a model for the future of the European orchestral landscape. Composed of around 40 musicians from 20 different nations, and independent of external sponsorship, the MCO plays operas and concerts all over the world, in cities as well as at exclusive festivals from the North Pole to the Red Sea. The orchestra was founded in 1997 by the musicians themselves and Claudio Abbado, and the two have been reaching milestones of European musical life together ever since.

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