

The Mahler Chamber Orchestra tours with Daniel Harding in northern Italy

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The orchestra gives its debut performance at the Budapest Spring Festival

Schumann, Brahms and Beethoven are on the program of the spring tour that takes the orchestra from Parma and Pistoia to Cremona and Bologna and all the way to Budapest. Principal Conductor Daniel Harding will lead the concerts; soloist for the first half of the tour will be H el ene Grimaud and for the second half Fazil Say.

Robert Schumann's only opera Genoveva had its premiere on 25 June 1850 in Leipzig, and Schumann conducted the first public performance of the opera's overture in February of the same year. The work was not a success at the time of its premiere, and because of its weak libretto it has remained unpopular and is rarely performed. The Z urich Opera House reintroduced it to audiences in February 2008 with a successful staging by Martin Kusej. The overture is reminiscent of Wagner's operatic works: we are confronted with strong recurring motifs that foreshadow the dark atmosphere of the plot and also introduce the main themes and motives of the characters.

Johannes Brahms' Third Symphony was composed at the beginning of the 1880's, just as an intense debate raged between representatives of the New German School and champions of Absolute Music with regard to the emphasis and value of the symphonic form. The composition became the subject of considerable controversy and its premiere earned Brahms a reputation as conservative and unimaginative among certain members of the concert-going public. The vast majority, however, were very enthusiastic about the work, not only at its premiere in Vienna in 1883, but also the concerts that followed in other cities. A century later, the third movement Poco Allegretto was made into a classic of film music through its use in Goodbye Again, a film version of Fran oise Sagan's novel Aimez-vous Brahms?

Ludwig van Beethoven's Third and Fourth Piano Concertos both demonstrate concrete steps toward redefinition and expansion of the form. Piano Concerto no.3 presents the piano soloist for the first time as an equal partner opposite the collective of the orchestra. The structure of its movements sets it apart from the traditional virtuosic concerto, bringing it closer to the form of a symphonic work. In Piano Concerto no.4, solistic virtuosity is replaced by expressive depth. The premiere in December 1808 was part of an important moment in the history of music: in addition to the Piano Concerto, Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies as well as his Choral Fantasy were presented to an astonished audience at Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

Daniel Harding and the MCO were received by enthusiastic audiences in northern Italy last season as well. The Italian press called the performance at the Teatro Ponchielli in Cremona in March 2008 a "masterful and perfect presentation", and after the triumphant opening concert of the Bologna Festival in 2008, the invitation to return in 2009 was extended on the very same evening.

Eastern Europe, however, is new territory for the orchestra, and the ensemble looks forward to its first visit to Hungary's capital city. The Budapest Spring Festival has been one of the high profile cultural events in Eastern Europe since its founding in the mid 1990's. Over the course of three days, Budapest presents theatre, visual arts, and music of all kinds from all over Europe. The festival is international in character, and the list of performers ranges from the Bavarian State Orchestra under the direction of Kent Nagano to Nigel Kennedy and Maxim Vengerov to the Philadelphia Dance Company.

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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