

7th International ——— Music Festival
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Afterglows & Afterimages

Experiences:
Mendelssohn / Mahler



Warsaw ——— 17 November 2025

Experiences: Mendelssohn / Mahler

17 November (Monday) — 7.00 pm

Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera
Moniuszko Auditorium
1 Teatralny Square
Warsaw

Honorary patronage: His Excellency Valdemaras Sarapinas,
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic
of Lithuania to the Republic of Poland

Concert programme

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

(1809–1847)

Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64

(1844/1845)

Allegro molto appassionato

Andante

Allegretto non troppo –

Allegro molto vivace

Gustav Mahler

(1860–1911)

Symphony No. 1 in D major (*Titan*)

(1896/1910)

Langsam. Schleppend.

Wie ein Naturlaut

Kräftig bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell

Feierlich und gemessen,

ohne zu schleppen

Stürmisch bewegt

Performers:

Sinfonia Varsovia

Radosław Szulc

conductor

Julian Rachlin

violin

Experiences: Mendelssohn / Mahler

There has always been a dispute over the sense and effect of music. It was no different in the 19th century: Some thought that music was the art of combining sounds in such a way as to create the impression of beautiful harmony and perfection of musical form; others believed that the essence of music was to present an extra-musical reality. Franz Liszt, one of the most outstanding artists of the Romantic era, noticed that the dispute resulted in two approaches to the art of composition. The first was about a classic formal shape and an attractive sound, whereas the second focused on reproducing extra-musical content in a suggestive manner.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, a supporter of the former, believed that a musical work must be characterised by classic elegance and beauty, which should always prevail over the representation of elements of reality. And he remained faithful to this attitude, although it has to be said that he was fascinated by nature and that he loved to travel and explore interesting places. These experiences did have an influence on his music, but only an indirect one (Symphony No. 3 “Scottish”, Symphony No. 4 “Italian”), determining a local colour, at best. His entire legacy is distinguished by great attention to sophisticated structural proportions and the attractive shape of a piece, as well as to its sensuality and subtlety of sound.

The above features are most fully represented in the Violin Concerto in E minor, Op. 64, completed in 1844 (the revisions of the solo part come from 1845), in which sophisticated sounds, attractive and songful melodies and alluring and charming harmonies are brought to an unparalleled level of excellence. Despite remaining faithful to the classic three-movement structure and the contrast of tempi in the individual links (corresponding to the patterns from Mozart’s time), Mendelssohn did not give up Romantic individualism. This manifests itself in the transitions between the movements, flowing one into another without any breaks, or with the help of short connecting passages – a tied note in the bassoon part after the first movement and an introduction of several bars to the third movement. This idea paved the way for later Romantic artists and was one of the fundamentals of the symphonic poem.

In contrast to Mendelssohn, Gustav Mahler would repeatedly point out that his oeuvre was of a programmatic nature, as clearly evidenced by one of his statements: “For me, a symphony is tantamount to creating a world with all the technical resources available.”¹ This attitude is already reflected in his Symphony No. 1 in D major, performed for the first time in Budapest in 1889, but later subjected to various revisions by the author himself. In the original version, it was a five-movement programme symphony entitled *Titan*, taken from Jean Paul’s novel. In 1896, Mahler removed the second movement, and in an interview granted to *Neues Wiener Tagblatt* before the Viennese premiere in 1900, he revealed his own understanding of the work, the subject of which was a young protagonist, experiencing joy and suffering, undertaking and winning the struggle against adversity.

An important role in evoking this content is played by the musical imitation of nature, which manifests itself in the suggestive stylisation of bird song, present from the very beginning of the piece in the parts of flutes, oboes and clarinets. Repeated interval leaps down a fourth, held notes, revolving around the same harmonies – all of the above suggest a natural pedigree, the simplicity and immutability of nature. However, the hero’s exploration of the world is just as strongly associated with the profane aspects of human existence. This is reflected in the ludic, somewhat caustic dance (ländler) in the second movement; it is also expressed by the banality of the funeral march and the grotesque sound of the Jewish travelling band in the third movement. The negative experiences culminate in the finale of the symphony, as evidenced by the choice of the mourning key of F minor, the introduction of a demonic fanfare of fear or the presence of roaring wind instruments. However, conquering negative experiences and overcoming existential pessimism leads the hero to a triumphant apotheosis, returning to the victorious key of D major.

To better understand Symphony No. 1, an intertextual interpretation would be useful, as Mahler included melodic quotations from his earlier works, mainly from the cycle *Songs of a Wayfarer*. The lyrics of these songs, associated with musical motifs evoking nature or heartbreak, emphasise the extra-musical meaning of the piece.

Ryszard Daniel Golianek

¹ Nathalie Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler*, Leipzig 1923, p. 19.



Sinfonia Varsovia

The ensemble was established in 1984 as a result of the enlargement of Jerzy Maksymiuk's Polish Chamber Orchestra. The orchestra has established artistic relationships with the world's greatest conductors, including Witold Lutosławski and Lorin Maazel, as well as world-class soloists such as Piotr Anderszewski, Martha Argerich,

and Anne-Sophie Mutter. To date, Sinfonia Varsovia has played over 4,000 concerts on 5 continents and recorded over 300 albums, including for Decca, Deutsche Grammophon, Naxos, Sony and Warner. In 2004, Janusz Marynowski was appointed Director of Sinfonia Varsovia, a position that he has held ever since.

Radosław Szulc

– conductor



□ Wolfgang Schmidt

“It was not a loss, but rather an extraordinary revelation,” wrote the English press after a concert of the City of Birmingham Symphony

Orchestra conducted by Radosław Szulc, who replaced Jaap van Zweden at short notice. Mr. Szulc studied conducting in Vienna. As the Artistic Director of the Kammerorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, he has participated in numerous European concert tours with such soloists as Lang Lang, Mischa Maisky and Janine Jansen. The artist has conducted numerous orchestras, including the Bamberger Symphoniker, MDR-Sinfonieorchester, Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne and BR-Symphonieorchester.

Julian Rachlin

– violin



□ Marco Borggreve

Spanning nearly four decades, Julian Rachlin's career is a rare story of artistic evolution – from one of the world's most celebrated child prodigies to

a multidimensional musician at the peak of his profession. Since debuting at the age of 14 with the Vienna Philharmonic and Riccardo Muti, he has captivated audiences worldwide as a violinist and violist of expressive depth and technical brilliance, whilst also forging a stellar reputation as conductor, artistic director, and creative innovator.

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