

A man with grey hair, seen in profile from the chest up, looking upwards and to the right. He is wearing a dark, high-collared shirt. The background is dark, with a large, semi-circular area on the right containing faint, handwritten musical notation on staves.

GIANANDREA
NOSEDA

GUSTAV
MAHLER
SYMPHONY NO. **7**



**National
Symphony
Orchestra**
The
Kennedy
Center

National Symphony Orchestra

GIANANDREA NOSEDA, CONDUCTOR

“It’s always difficult for me to decide which work stands out among Mahler’s symphonies. Whenever I conduct one, I tend to feel that that particular symphony is the greatest. After recording the Seventh, with the superb artistry of the NSO musicians, I formed a special bond with it. For the moment, the Seventh holds a very dear place in my heart, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.”

—Gianandrea Nosedà



National Symphony Orchestra
The Kennedy Center

Gianandrea Nosedà
Music Director
The Roger Sant and
Congresswoman Doris Matsui Chair





National Symphony Orchestra

GIANANDREA NOSEDA, CONDUCTOR

GUSTAV MAHLER

(1860–1911)

Symphony No. 7 in E minor

- | | | |
|---|--|-------|
| 1 | Langsam (Adagio) - Allegro risoluto, ma non troppo..... | 22:11 |
| 2 | Nachtmusik I. Allegro moderato | 14:38 |
| 3 | Scherzo. Schattenhaft - Trio | 8:53 |
| 4 | Nachtmusik II. Andante amoroso | 12:08 |
| 5 | Rondo-Finale. Tempo I (Allegro ordinario) - Tempo II
(Allegro moderato ma energico) | 17:22 |

Total: 75:12



GUSTAV MAHLER

Symphony No. 7

Although many regard Gustav Mahler as the tone poet laureate of existentialism—the musical philosopher who most unforgettably voiced a 20th-century spirit of irony and despair—images of transcendent hope and redemption figure prominently in his work. These are especially present in the early symphonies, which draw on the early Romantic folk poetry collection known as *The Youth's Magic Horn*: the Second Symphony (“Resurrection”), for instance, culminates in a spiritual affirmation of transcendence, while the Fourth comes to rest with an enigmatically cheerful, childlike portrayal of heaven itself.

The Seventh Symphony presents an especially puzzling case insofar as it seems to combine the “existential” Mahler with a final movement that rejoices with Dionysian revelry, as if locating heaven right here on earth. But the no-holds-barred joy of that finale has shocked generations of the composer’s most fervent admirers. It contrasts drastically with the fiercely concentrated, bleak, inescapably tragic vision that dominates the Sixth Symphony. This is all the more remarkable if we recall that Mahler was working on both symphonies simultaneously at one point. Arguably no other score of his poses so many interpretive challenges. The ambivalence at the heart of this kaleidoscopic, enigmatic work has inspired contradictory solutions in performance. It is therefore no surprise that the Seventh has been the straggler among Mahler’s symphonies, the last to find wider acceptance. Not until the fall of 1979 did the National Symphony add this score to its repertoire, under the baton of Mstislav Rostropovich—with no less than Leonard Bernstein, who had been in town for a series of concerts with the Vienna Philharmonic, in attendance.

An important aspect of the Seventh that troubled critics from the start was the continually shifting character of the music as Mahler moves from one mood to another, seemingly without motivation, as if mimicking the irrational processes of the unconscious mind. In terms of style, the Seventh ranges from poetic dreamscapes to offbeat parody to raucous humor, ending with an intervention by the aforementioned finale—the most controversial part of the symphony—that bursts on the scene like an exuberant non-sequitur. If the dramatic juxtaposition of diverse elements

2. ch. von 2.
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Handwritten musical score for "The Rose Tree" by J. S. G. The score is written on 18 staves, each with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 4/4 time signature. The instruments listed on the left are: Flute (Fl.), Oboe (ob.), Clarinet in B-flat (cl. Bb.), Bassoon (Bas.), Trumpet (T.), Horn in F (Hörn. F.), Trombone (Tromp. F.), Tuba (Tub.), Piano (P.), Violin I (vl. I), Violin II (vl. II), Viola (v.), and Cello (c.). The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like "pp" (pianissimo) and "p" (piano). There are also some handwritten annotations and corrections throughout the score.

is a signature of Mahler's style, the Seventh stretches this process to new extremes. Homages to Romanticism and Classicism play a significant role, but these are filtered through an ironic, distancing lens more characteristic of Modernism. Mahler's diversity of stylistic references and moods even looks ahead to Postmodernism, touching on richly poetic dreamscapes infused with the spirit of early 19th-century Romanticism but also encompassing parody and boisterous humor and ending with what the biographer Henry-Louis de La Grange called "Rabelaisian verve." This wild variety, for some, is precisely what gives the work its unique strength. It embodies "a riotous celebration of the down-to-earth, relishing its messy diversity," according to the Mahler commentator Peter Davison. "The Seventh does not deny the possibility of transcendence, but shows that only the full acceptance of the limitations of incarnate being can provide a foundation for enduring spiritual growth."

Mahler experienced unusual difficulty finding his way into this music. Working from the inside out, he began with the second and fourth movements (both of which he designated "night music" pieces). Mahler composed these during the summer of 1904 but then faced a creative block in the following summer, when he retreated at the end of the opera season to his "composer's hut" at Maiernigg in the Austrian Alps, a refuge from the stress of Vienna. Struggling with the opening movement in particular, Mahler was on the verge of giving up when he experienced an epiphany, as he recounted it, that illuminated the way forward. This occurred while he was being ferried from the train station across the lake to his retreat. "With the first stroke of the oars," Mahler recalled several years later, "the theme (or rather, the rhythm and style) of the introduction to the first movement came to me." He then sketched out the three remaining movements of the Seventh Symphony (first, third, and fifth) at a rapid pace and completed the orchestration in 1906. However, Mahler waited until Prague's 60th-anniversary celebrations of the rule of Habsburg Emperor Franz Joseph provided an occasion to unveil the work and conducted the Czech Philharmonic in the first performance in September 1908.

Because of Mahler's distrust of programmatic descriptions by this point in his career, there is no easy "narrative" by which to orient the listener. He did provide this brief overview in a description to a colleague: "*Three night pieces; the finale, bright day. As foundation for the whole, the first movement.*" The Seventh Symphony is sometimes known by the unofficial nickname "Song of the Night" (not Mahler's), but the nighttime imagery that has become closely associated with this music goes beyond introspective melancholy. "Song of the Night" is actually something of a

misnomer if it conjures images of night as a darkness that requires “transcendence.” Far from a monolithic threat, the darkness of the Seventh reflects the positive qualities associated by the German Romantics with nighttime.

Alma Mahler suggested that her husband had wanted to evoke the magic of writers he loved from the early 19th century, such as Joseph Eichendorff (1788–1857). Thus the middle movements, she wrote, were shot through with “*visions of Eichendorff’s poetry, rippling fountains, German Romanticism.*” La Grange pointed to similarities in atmosphere shared by the Romantic writer Novalis’s *Hymns to the Night*, with their “*shadows of the past... vague yearnings, and deceived hopes,*” and Nietzsche’s philosopher-prophet Zarathustra, whose pivotal “Midnight Song” Mahler had previously set to music in his Third Symphony (a work that casts a shadow of its own over the Seventh). The Nietzschean subtext, according to La Grange, involves “a night of clairvoyance and heightened lucidity whose revelation is more essential than that of light.”

The conductor Willem Mengelberg, a significant early Mahler champion, believed that Rembrandt’s 1642 painting *The Night Watch* was a visual inspiration for the second movement (the first of the Seventh’s two “night musics”), though a colleague clarified the connection by suggesting that Mahler responded to Rembrandt’s technique of shading and chiaroscuro more than to his subject matter. Nature also forms an important element of Mahler’s nightscapes. In general, as La Grange observes, the Seventh “seems to welcome intrusions with a strange passivity, to mirror the strange diversity of the twentieth-century man’s experience, a diversity which has become impossible to synthesize... in a disillusioned present which knows... that ambiguities can never be solved.”

For all their heterogeneity, the Seventh’s five movements are held together by a unifying symmetry. The first and fifth movements counterbalance each other in proportion; the two “night music” movements, together with the central Scherzo they flank, similarly form an internal continuity roughly equal to each of the outer movements. What results is a neatly balanced arch shape (A-B-C-B-A), such that the odd-numbered movements modify more familiar, conventional forms (sonata, scherzo with trio, rondo finale), while the second and fourth movements are closer to fantasias that reinterpret the romantic “character” pieces otherwise known, respectively, as nocturne and serenade.

A shadowy mystique permeates the symphony’s opening moments—the passage that came to Mahler so suddenly during his boat ride. Over a stuttering, funereal accompaniment, its harmony unstable, Mahler superimposes the cry



The Night Watch, Rembrandt van Rijn, 1642

of a “tenor horn”—normally associated with brass bands, the unusual sonority of this instrument is our first indication of the Seventh’s distinctive and original orchestration. The first theme features a dotted, descending, three-note pattern as well as a long-short-short rhythm; both of these recur as unifying devices throughout the symphony. The accompaniment calls to mind the lugubrious Miserere march from Verdi’s *Il trovatore*—an opera saturated with night settings. With a fierce charge, the introduction accelerates into a fiery Allegro, its music transformed into a driving march that bears a close family resemblance to the opening theme of Mahler’s Sixth Symphony. The yearningly lyrical second theme serves as the critical center of the development, where it emerges like a full moon from obscuring clouds and reaches a swooning, visionary climax. Mahler then plunges headlong into the introductory music again, beginning a varied process of recapitulation.

The first “night music” movement represents still another kind of march, one that slowly comes into focus amid echoes, fluttering sounds, and night calls before settling into a major-minor pattern that is Mahler’s musical equivalent of chiaroscuro. The effect is enticingly ambiguous. As in Béla Bartók’s night music, bird calls and sensuous new colors (including cowbells) emerge under cover of darkness. The Schubert-like charm of the contrasting melody is one of the nostalgic evocations of the past that figure in these middle movements.

“Shadowy” (*schattenhaft*) is Mahler’s marking for the central scherzo, a spectral Viennese waltz that both mocks and seems to outdo Romantic grotesquerie. The oboe’s cheerful tune in the trio comes back in a funhouse distortion when played by trombones and tuba. Echoes of the symphony’s opening theme heighten the symmetry by recurring at the center of the scherzo.

Mahler’s scoring here and in the ensuing “night music,” an *Andante amoroso* that serves as a gentle parody of the lover’s serenade, has a chamber music-like intimacy and painterly quality. The *Andante amoroso* is the first movement cast from the start in a major key (F major), with the sonorities of the mandolin and guitar evoking an ironic nostalgia. This second of the “night music” interludes herald the arrival of resplendent day in the finale, at the beginning of which exuberant timpani set in motion the brassy fanfare of a multipart rondo theme. In parts it resembles a drunken imitation of the pompously marching swagger from Richard Wagner’s Prelude to *Die Meistersinger*. The C major brightness of this music—Mahler pointedly designates it *Allegro ordinario*—intrudes unexpectedly after all that has preceded.

The finale, writes Peter Davison, gives us the feeling that “we are coming home after an exhausting emotional journey and that the light of dawn is reawakening the human world.” But this complex movement remains the Seventh Symphony’s interpretive stumbling block, for, La Grange observes, “Mahler flouts all rules, all limits, all habits and all traditions, particularly those he seems to want to revive.” Amid elaborate variations on the hyperactive rondo theme, which recurs seven times, “heaven turns to hell, day to night, joy to pain, laughter to a grimace, incense to sulfur, the Te Deum to carnival music, gold to lead.” The alternating tempos and elaborate variations on the hyperactive rondo music insist on an attitude of insolently clamorous joy. Mahler noted in connection with the finale that “everything has its price” (“Was kostet die Welt!”). Amid all the affirmation, one last ambiguous touch—an unexpected harmony—threatens to trip up everything before the Seventh reaches its close in unadulterated C major.

Instrumentation: four flutes (fourth doubles piccolo), piccolo, three oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, Eb clarinet, three bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, two harps, almglocken, bass drum, cymbals, glockenspiel, rute, suspended cymbal, suspended crash cymbal, snare drum, tambourine, tam tam, triangle, strings.



GIANANDREA NOSEDA

Music Director

Gianandrea Nosedà is one of the world's most sought-after conductors, hailed for his artistry in both concert halls and opera houses around the globe. The National Symphony Orchestra's 2025–2026 season marks his ninth as Music Director.

Nosedà's leadership has inspired and reinvigorated the National Symphony Orchestra, which makes its home at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. The orchestra's renewed artistic recognition and critical acclaim have led to invitations to Carnegie Hall and international concert halls, digital streaming services, and a record label distributed by LSO Live—for which Nosedà records as Principal Guest Conductor. Nosedà's discography of more than 80 recordings includes dozens of celebrated albums with a wide range of orchestras and repertoire for various labels, including Deutsche Grammophon and Chandos.

Nosedà was named General Music Director of the Zurich Opera House in September 2021, conducting two highly praised complete *Ring* Cycles in 2024. He was recognized as “Best Conductor” by the jury of the German OPER! AWARDS, specifically for his Wagner interpretations.

From 2007–2018, Nosedà served as Music Director of the Teatro Regio Torino, where his leadership marked the opera house's golden era.

Nosedà has conducted the most renowned international orchestras in opera houses and festivals, with significant roles at the BBC Philharmonic (Chief Conductor), Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (Principal Guest Conductor), Mariinsky Theatre (Principal Guest Conductor), Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale Della RAI (Principal Guest Conductor), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (Victor De Sabata Chair, Rotterdam Philharmonic (Principal Guest Conductor), and Stresa Festival (Artistic Director.)

Working with the next generation of musicians is one of Nosedà's greatest passions. In the summer of 2025, he led Carnegie Hall's National Youth Orchestra of the USA in a tour of major concert halls in China, Korea, and Japan. In 2019, he was appointed the founding Music Director of the Tsinandali Festival and Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra in the village of Tsinandali, Georgia.

A native of Milan, Nosedà is Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana, a prestigious title marking his contribution to art in Italy. He has been honored as "Conductor of the Year" by both *Musical America* and the International Opera Awards. He is also a recipient of the Puccini Award whose past recipients include legendary opera stars Maria Callas, Birgit Nilsson, and Luciano Pavarotti.



The NSO Music Director Chair is generously endowed by Roger Sant and Congresswoman Doris Matsui. Funding for NSO recordings is provided by generous Nosedà Era Fund supporters.

NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The 2025–2026 season is the National Symphony Orchestra’s 95th and Music Director Gianandrea Noseda’s ninth season. Noseda serves as the orchestra’s seventh Music Director, joining the NSO’s legacy of distinguished leaders: Christoph Eschenbach, Leonard Slatkin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Antal Doráti, Howard Mitchell, and Hans Kindler. The NSO’s artistic leadership also includes Principal Conductor and Artistic Advisor Steven Reineke.

Since its founding in 1931, the NSO has been committed to performances that enrich the lives of its audience and community members. In 1986, the National Symphony became an artistic affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where it has performed since the Center opened in 1971. The 96-member orchestra participates in events of national and international importance, including the annual nationally televised concerts on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol, live-streamed performances on medici.tv, and local radio broadcasts on WETA Classical 90.9 FM.

Following the launch of its eponymous recording label in 2020, the NSO has embarked on ambitious projects including its first complete Beethoven Symphony cycle and the release of the first-ever cycle of George Walker’s *Sinfonias*, both led by Noseda. Recent projects include *Four Symphonic Works* by Kennedy Center Composer-in-Residence Carlos Simon conducted by Noseda, and William Shatner’s *So Fragile, So Blue*, recorded live in the Concert Hall with the NSO under Steven Reineke. Forthcoming releases with Gianandrea Noseda include music by Gustav Mahler, William Grant Still, and Samuel Barber’s opera *Vanessa*.

The NSO’s community engagement and education projects are nationally recognized, and career development opportunities for young musicians include the NSO Youth Fellowship Program and its acclaimed, tuition-free Summer Music Institute.



NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

VIOLINS

Nurit Bar-Josef, *Concertmaster*

Ying Fu, *Associate Concertmaster*,

The Jeanne Weaver Ruesch Chair

Ricardo Cyncynates, *Assistant Concertmaster*

Jane Bowyer Stewart

Teri Hopkins Lee

Pavel Pekarsky

Heather LeDoux Green

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Lisa-Beth Lambert

Jing Qiao

Angelia Cho

Mae Lin**

Regino Madrid**

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Dayna Hepler, *Assistant Principal*

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Cynthia R. Finks

Deanna Lee Bien

Glenn Donnellan

Natasha Bogachek

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Jae-Yeon Kim

Wanzhen Li

Hanna Lee

Benjamin Scott

Malorie Blake Shin

Marina Aikawa

Peiming Lin

Derek Powell

Susan Midkiff*

VIOLAS

Daniel Foster, *Principal*,

The Mrs. John Dimick Chair

Abigail Evans Kreuzer, *Assistant Principal*

Denise Wilkinson

James Francis Deighan

Nancy Thomas

Jennifer Mondie

Tsuna Sakamoto

Ruth Wicker

Mahoko Eguchi

Rebecca Epperson

Chiara Dieguez**

Ally Goodman*

Johanna Nowik*

Nana Vaughn*

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The Strong Family and the

Hattie M. Strong Foundation

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Steven Honigberg

David Teie

James Lee

Rachel Young

Mark Evans

Eugena Chang Riley

Loewi Lin

Britton Riley

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Richard Barber, *Assistant Principal*

Jeffrey Weisner

Ira Gold

Paul DeNola

Charles Nilles

Alexander Jacobsen

Michael Marks

HARP

Adriana Horne, *Principal*

FLUTES

Aaron Goldman, *Principal*

Leah Arsenault Barrick, *Assistant Principal*

Matthew Ross

Carole Bean, *Piccolo*

Sarah Frisof*

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The Volunteer Council Chair

Jamie Roberts, *Assistant Principal*

Harrison Linsey

Kathryn Meany Wilson, *English Horn*

Jessica Warren*

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Eugene Mondie, *Assistant Principal*
Paul Cigan
Peter Cain, Bass Clarinet
David Gould*

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David Young, *Assistant Principal*
Steven Wilson
Samuel Blair,** Contrabassoon

HORNS

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The National Trustees' Chair
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Robert Rearden
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The Strong Family and the
Hattie M. Strong Foundation
Michael Harper, *Assistant Principal*
Tom Cupples
Timothy McCarthy**

TROMBONES

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Casey Jones,** *Acting Assistant Principal*
David Murray
Matthew Guilford, Bass Trombone

TUBAS

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The James V. Kimsey Chair
Seth Cook*

TIMPANI

Jauvon Gilliam,** *Principal*,
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Scott Christian, *Acting Principal*

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The Hechinger Foundation Chair
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Joseph Connell*
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Greg Akagi*
Caleb Breidenbaugh*
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STAGE MANAGERS

David Langrell, *Manager*
N. Christian Bottorff, *Assistant Manager*

The National Symphony Orchestra uses a system of revolving strings. In each string section, untitled members are listed in order of length of service.

* Regularly engaged extra

** Temporary position

*** Leave of Absence



GUSTAV MAHLER

SYMPHONY NO. 7

Recorded live in the Concert Hall of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
May 30–31, and June 1, 2024

Recording Producer: **Blanton Alspaugh, Soundmirror**

Recording Engineer: **Mark Donahue, Soundmirror**

Mastering Engineer: **Mark Donahue, Soundmirror**

Executive Producers: **Nigel Boon and Genevieve Twomey, National Symphony Orchestra**

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