

Friday 8 May / 7.30pm

Mahler's Ninth Symphony

Gustav Mahler (1860–1911)

Symphony No. 9

Andante comodo - Im Tempo eines gemächlichen Ländlers (In a comfortable Ländler tempo) - Rondo. Burleske - Molto adagio. Sehr langsam und noch zurückhaltend (Very slow and even reluctant).

Gustav Mahler composed his Ninth Symphony – unusually, for him – in a single summer. It was 1909. Having returned from New York, where he was chief conductor of the Metropolitan Opera, he had taken his wife Alma to the health spa at Levico and had returned alone to a rented house in the Alpine countryside near Toblach (modern Dobbiaco), where he'd spent the previous summer completing his song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*. Now, alone in the woodland hut that he used as a private study (and which Alma called, mockingly, his "earth closet") he composed. Alma believed that he felt relieved of a psychological burden: his superstition that Ninth Symphonies were cursed to be their composer's last. By composing *Das Lied von der Erde* – a ninth symphony in all but name – he was convinced he'd cheated fate.

Then – as now – the musical world moved slowly, and Mahler had commitments back in the USA. The symphony would not be heard until after his death, and the audience for the world premiere (in June 1912) included the young avant-garde composer Alban Berg. "The most wonderful music Mahler ever wrote" was Berg's verdict; he heard in the symphony both "remarkable love for this world" and "a foreboding of death".

Would Mahler have agreed? He must have suspected that this would be his last completed symphony (though he was soon at work on another). Certainly, he'd lived through intense tragedy (the death of his young daughter) and knew that his own health was dangerously weak. And he peppered his score with emotionally charged instructions – *Mit Wut* (with anger), *schattenhaft* (shadowy), *wie ein schwerer kondukt* (like a solemn funeral procession). Fanfares, waltzes and snatches of hymns weave their way through the music, inviting us to imagine our own meanings and pictures. Then there's the beginning and ending. The symphony opens with a sighing, two-note theme that the conductor Bruno Walter thought (and Mahler may have backed him up on this) represented the word *leb' wohl* (farewell). It ends with – well, see what you think: it leaves few listeners unmoved.

What's certain is that Mahler would have asked only that we listen - and, ideally, respond with an open heart. Some have heard the quiet, faltering opening rhythm as a representation of Mahler's own uneven heartbeat, but after the yearning first melody, the first movement opens out into a huge, circular survey of Mahler's world and emotions, by turns tender, ghostly, passionate, violent and nostalgic. The second movement is a dance, sometimes playful, sometimes brilliant, and sometimes bittersweet. Trumpets announce the third movement, which Mahler called a *Burleske*: a joke with a fierce satirical bite, charged with the hectic, anxious gaiety of military bands. A great, passionate cry for the strings launches the *finale*: a lingering farewell which – after saying everything its heart has to say - begins a long, breathless fade to silence.

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Domingo Hindoyan conductor

Domingo Hindoyan is Chief Conductor of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and Music Director Designate of Los Angeles Opera, where he will begin his tenure as Music Director in the 2026/27 season.

Since beginning his tenure in Liverpool, Hindoyan has shaped a distinctive artistic vision with the orchestra, marked by highly praised performances, dynamic programming, and an ongoing commitment to new music through championing numerous world premieres and commissions. His leadership has also included international touring, most recently around Japan, and has released six albums with the orchestra. In the 2025/26 season, his fifth as Chief Conductor, he leads major works including Mahler's Ninth Symphony, Bruckner's Sixth Symphony, and a concert performance of Dvořák's *Rusalka*.

Alongside his work in Liverpool, Hindoyan appears regularly with leading orchestras across Europe and the United States. He returns this season to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, New World Symphony Miami, Orchestre National de Bordeaux Aquitaine, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Paris Opera. He also makes debuts with the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh Symphony, and Zurich Opera.

On the opera stage, Hindoyan has conducted productions at the Metropolitan Opera, Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin, Wiener Staatsoper, Paris Opera, Opéra National de Bordeaux, Teatro Real Madrid, Royal Swedish Opera, Liceu Opera Barcelona, Opéra du Rhin, Royal Opera House Muscat, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Los Angeles Opera.

Social engagement is a key part of Hindoyan's artistic identity. In Liverpool, he collaborates closely with the In Harmony programme, part of the UK's national music education initiative inspired by Venezuela's El Sistema. Also inspired by El Sistema, Domingo founded the MusicEnsemble initiative in Geneva. His commitment to community and education mirrors his dedication to artistic excellence.

Hindoyan's discography with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic includes *Verismo* (released in October 2023), *Roberto Sierra* celebrating Sierra's music from the past 25 years (April 2023), *Bruckner's Symphony No. 4* (February 2024), *Venezuela! Music from the Americas!* (October 2024), and a recording of *Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6 and Souvenir de Florence* (April 2025), and most recently *Iberia* released in October 2025.

He continues to lead acclaimed ensembles worldwide, including the Cleveland Orchestra, Houston Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, New Japan Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic, and Aarhus Symphony Orchestra. He is a regular guest at international festivals, including the Menuhin Festival Gstaad and Festival Radio France Occitanie Montpellier.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Domingo Hindoyan began his career as a violinist in the renowned El Sistema programme and later joined Daniel Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. He later studied conducting at the Haute École de Musique de Genève under Professor Laurent Gay and served as Barenboim's first assistant at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin from 2013 to 2016.

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra is the UK's oldest continuing professional symphony orchestra. Performing more than 100 concerts every season from their home, Liverpool Philharmonic Hall, the Orchestra embodies the organisation's commitment to enhancing and transforming lives through music.

Now in its 185th season, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra – comprised of 80 full-time salaried musicians – is a cornerstone of Liverpool's vibrant cultural life and a global ambassador of the city through an extensive touring schedule over the years throughout the UK, Asia, Europe and the US.

Led by Chief Conductor Domingo Hindoyan, the Orchestra has presented critically acclaimed concerts at home and on tour, working with world-class soloists and achieving recording success with eight internationally celebrated albums.

The Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra reaches millions worldwide through broadcasts and streaming and has 13 million total listeners on Spotify across 180 countries. The Orchestra is one of the most active Orchestras in the UK in supporting new music, with over 300 new works premiered and commissioned in the last 20 years. Alongside many works by Liverpool-born and Northwest-based composers including Mark Simpson, the Orchestra has given world premiere performances of major works by Eleanor Alberga, Grace-Evangeline Mason, Roberto Sierra, Sir Karl Jenkins, and Dani Howard, to name a few.

In 2024, the Orchestra won the Gramophone Classical Music Album of the Year Award in the orchestral category for a Vaughan Williams recording with Principal Guest Conductor Andrew Manze, making this the Orchestra's third Gramophone Award.

Increasing access to music-making for young people, NHS patients and early career musicians, the Orchestra plays a central role in Liverpool Philharmonic's wide-reaching learning and community engagement programmes, which support over 100,000 people each year.