St. Louis Symphony

David Robertson, Music Director
Timothy McAllister, Saxophone

Saxophone Concerto ..........................................JOHN ADAMS (b. 1947)
Animato; Moderato, Tranquillo, suave
Molto vivo (a hard driving pulse)

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor ......GUSTAV MAHLER (1860-1911)
Part 1:
Trauermarsch. In gemessenem Schritt. Streng Wie ein Kondukt
Stürmisch bewegt, mit größter Vehemenz

Part 2:
Scherzo. Kräftig, nicht zu schnell

Part 2:
Adagietto. Sehr langsam —
Rondo-Finale. Allegro

Wednesday, January 27, 2016 at 7:30 p.m.

St. Louis Symphony is exclusively represented by Opus 3 Artists.

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On Edge
by Eddie Silva

Their music is made of the worlds around them, Gustav Mahler and John Adams. Mahler of that thrilling age, the shift from the 19th to the 20th century, the speed of the modern beginning to change how people think and act. Also a time of anxiety, especially for a Jewish artist in an anti-Semitic Vienna. Mahler, always a bit on edge, neurotic—he even had a session with Sigmund Freud. Yet he heard the music of the hurdy-gurdy, of the Alp horn, of cowbells and brought them into his symphonies. “A symphony must be like the world,” he said, “it must contain everything.”

Adams of the American baby-boom generation, of an age of great movements and upheavals, turmoil, anxiety, and terror. He’s composed with pen and paper and with computer. The sounds of Big Sur are in his music, and the sounds heard on vinyl and the hi-fi and transistor radio. He’s made music with recording tape. For the music he makes with orchestras you may hear the sounds of sea and industry near San Francisco Bay, you may hear trains menacingly rumbling through the night, you may hear the first atom bomb explode, you may hear the names of those who died in the Twin Towers spoken like a hymn. He titled his memoir Hallelujah Junction, which is an apt description of the ecstatic shout that emerges from music made at the meeting of many crossroads.

Saxophone Concerto
JOHN ADAMS
(Born February 15, 1947 in Worcester)

Scoring
solo alto saxophone
2 flutes
piccolo
3 oboes
English horn
2 clarinets
bass clarinet
2 bassoons
3 horns
2 trumpets
piano
celeste
harp

Performance Time
approximately 29 minutes
It rides an edge, as John Adams' music often does. The composer has a genuine appreciation for musical genres whose habitat, for the most part, lies outside the orchestra hall—jazz, blues, swing, rock, pop. The music he first heard in his home, especially that played by his father, continues to inspire his compositions. He adapts these “outside” genres to his own signature style—as American composers have since Ives and Gershwin, and as Mahler did as a musical omnivore, incorporating the sounds of the street, the village, the hills, and the concert halls into his symphonies.

Adams is not shy about his influences. He writes how the jazz sax traditions encompassing John Coltrane, Eric Dolphy, Wayne Shorter, Stan Getz, Charlie Parker and Cannonball Adderley are all part of the genesis of the Saxophone Concerto. Saxophone and jazz are inseparable associations, and Adams goes so far as to deem the saxophone “the transformative vehicle for vernacular music (jazz, rock, blues, and funk) in the 20th century.” Again, his father played the alto in swing bands in the 1930s, and the composer has employed the instrument in *Nixon in China*, *Fearful Symmetries* and the recent *City Noir*.

Although he names his influences, chances are you’re not going to recognize Stan Getz’s *Focus* in the Saxophone Concerto. You’re going to hear music riding the edge of these influences while maintaining its jazz/classical balance.

A more active influence on the piece is the soloist himself, Timothy McAllister. Adams tells this anecdote: “When one evening during a dinner conversation Tim mentioned that during high school he had been a champion stunt bicycle rider, I knew that I must compose a concerto for this fearless musician and risk-taker.”

One thing a champion stunt bicycle rider must have is an innate sense of balance, especially in the most extreme positions, and as the soloist for Adams’ Saxophone Concerto, keeping upright between the jazz and classical modes.

McAllister admits to leaning too far over the line in early performances of the work—playing in a jazz style that felt too gritty. With the St. Louis Symphony, in performances recorded in Powell Hall in 2013, he found his sweet spot.

The concerto “needs to be played with the rigor a classical player can achieve,” McAllister has said. “There are a lot of intonation struggles throughout the piece, a lot of complicated structures and delicate textures to be negotiated along with its veiled tonality. And it all has to be really precise, rhythmically.” Jazz elements emerge in the “big arching lines, like you’d see from the great jazz players—but played with a classical mouthpiece, over a busy orchestration.”

The first performance was on August 22, 2013, in Sydney, Australia, where Timothy McAllister played the solo saxophone part, and the composer conducted the Sydney Symphony Orchestra.
Symphony No. 5 in C-sharp minor  
GUSTAV MAHLER  
(Born July 7, 1860 in Kaliste; died May 18, 1911 in Vienna)

Scoring  
4 flutes  
4 piccolos  
3 oboes  
English horn  
3 clarinets  
E-flat clarinet  
D clarinet  
bass clarinet  
3 bassoons  
contrabassoon  
6 horns  
4 trumpets  
3 trombones  
tuba  
timpani  
harp  
percussion  
strings

Performance Time  
approximately 68 minutes

“How did we get here?” This is a note I scrawled a few times on my notepad while listening to Mahler’s Symphony No. 5. Encountering this sprawling universe, barely contained in symphonic form, reminds me of a friend’s viewing of David Lynch’s Mulholland Drive at Cannes a number of years ago. After seeing so many movies in so many days, during Mulholland she very briefly dozed, perhaps little more than a minute. When she awoke, she thought a different movie was on the screen.

Mahler has a similar effect, even when you are fully conscious. Doors suddenly open to totally unfamiliar scenes, or to themes you thought had been used up, only to return, sometimes menacingly. The symphony famously begins with a dark-themed trumpet solo, with a funeral march and numerous funereal, and even comic gestures—the low brass seem to drag along the ground at one point. You think this is played out by the second movement, tense with its own anxieties. Then, as the critic Donald Mitchell observed, “a door opens, and there, from another room, we hear the initiating funeral march still being played by another orchestra.”

Mahler conceived of this symphony as a breaking away from his previous symphonies. He labeled his first symphonies a tetralogy, the Wunderhorn symphonies. The composer had gained new confidence by the time he’d
reached his Fifth, telling his closest confidante, Natalie Bauer-Lechner, “I feel that I can achieve anything and that for a long time to come my resources will belong to me and obey me.” He dispenses with writing lengthy program notes to accompany his symphonies. He will let them be known musically. He leaves behind the human voice and the sung word. The orchestra is now his full means of expression.

It is the beginning of a new century and Mahler is in love. He expresses his anxieties of this new age, as well as his hopes and optimism, and he will confess his love—all in his Fifth Symphony.

It appears that Mahler wrote Part II of the symphony, the long third-movement Scherzo, first. He may have considered including this in his Fourth Symphony, but it was something other—a new beginning, or the core of a new beginning. It is where the Fifth most distinctly turns, and it is fascinating to contemplate Mahler’s compositional mind—how he constructs disparate beauties from this divided center.

Those first two movements are sequences of interruptions. The first is abrasive, funereal, then tender, with these moods writhing betwixt and between one another, shouting alarms, mourning beautifully, until all fades. The second movement spins into a froth, with those reiterations of deathly themes unreconciled. You come to the end and wonder, “How did I reach such a desultory place?” Like you ask yourself in life.

In the Scherzo, life changes. “Every note is charged with life,” Mahler said of it, “and the whole thing whirls round in a giddy dance.” Harmonies brighten. A solo horn resists diminishment and supplies the timbre for the whole movement. There are dances until quiescence ensues. The universe of the symphony takes a breath, an expansive caesura, and then comes one of the most dramatic turns as can be found in orchestral literature.

A waltz bursts forth, chaos in time. A waltz without smiles. The timpani played with hard sticks. A ghostly ensemble fades in, one last blast of chaos, and a mad finish. One door slams shut. A Viennese icon gets left abandoned.

“That scherzo is an accursed movement!” Mahler wrote Alma, cursing at himself as if he were Dr. Frankenstein. “It will have a long tale of woe! For the next 50 years conductors will take it too fast and make nonsense of it. And audiences—heavens!—how should they react to this chaos, which is constantly giving birth to new worlds and promptly destroying them again!”

Followed by the Adagietto. How did we get here? Through love.

It is the second song of the symphony, after the funeral march in the first movement. It is hard not to hear it cinematically, as it has been used and overused (as in Visconti’s Death in Venice) and imitated for passionate moments on the big screen. It is heard in times of mourning—Leonard Bernstein conducted it for Robert Kennedy’s funeral Mass in New York City. But first it is a love letter, an homage, to the woman who will be the composer’s bride. Mahler even composed words to it—at least we think he did, other suspected lyricists are the conductor Willem Mengelberg, or Alma herself. But the poem
remarkably fits with the song: “How I love you/ You my sun/ I cannot tell you/ With words/ Only my longing/ Can I pour out to you/ And my love/ My joy!”

The harp anchors the strings through long swells of emotion.

After all the storms and torment, the violent interruptions, the menace, the madness and despair of this turbulent symphony, Mahler ends classically—rich harmonics, revelatory counterpoint. The finale has had its detractors, with Theodor Adorno describing it most brittlely as “extorted reconciliation.”

But the Symphony No. 5 is nothing if not a drama of opposites. How did we get here? If we began with a funeral march, we end with life brimming. If pathways have zig-zagged, mired, dissolved, we end in familiar territory, which seems new.

The music makes no argument for itself. It needs none.

The first performance was on October 18, 1904, in Cologne, where the Gürzenich Orchestra Cologne was conducted by the composer.

Program notes by Eddie Silva, External Affairs and Publications Manager for the St. Louis Symphony.

DAVID ROBERTSON
Music Director, St. Louis Symphony

A consummate musician, masterful programmer, and dynamic presence, American maestro David Robertson has established himself as one of today’s most sought-after conductors. A passionate and compelling communicator with an extensive orchestral and operatic repertoire, he has forged close relationships with major orchestras around the world through his exhilarating music-making and stimulating ideas.

In fall 2015, Robertson launches his 11th season as Music Director of the 136-year-old St. Louis Symphony. In January 2014, Robertson assumed the post of Chief Conductor and Artistic Director of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in Australia.

Highlights of the 2015-16 season with the St. Louis Symphony include a California tour in January and February, featuring Mahler’s Symphony No. 5 and Messiaen’s Des canyons aux étoiles... (From the Canyons to the Stars...), with accompanying video imagery by photographer Deborah O’Grady. Also on the California tour will be soloist Timothy McAllister performing John Adams’ Saxophone Concerto. The concerto was part of the latest Symphony recording, City Noir, on Nonesuch, which received the 2015 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. Other highlights for Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony are the U.S. premiere of Tan Dun’s Contrabass Concerto: The Wolf,
featuring Principal Double Bass Erik Harris, and John Adams’ most recent symphony for violin, *Scheherazade.2*, performed by Leila Josefowicz.

In 2014-15 Robertson led the Symphony back to Carnegie Hall, performing Meredith Monk’s *WEAVE* for Carnegie’s celebration of the artist, as well as Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 4. Zachary Woolfe of *The New York Times* wrote: “Mr. Robertson led a ferociously focused performance of Tchaikovsky’s Fourth Symphony, the phrasing taut but natural as breathing.”

Born in Santa Monica, California, David Robertson was educated at London’s Royal Academy of Music, where he studied horn and composition before turning to orchestral conducting. Robertson is the recipient of numerous awards and honors.

**TIMOTHY MCALLISTER**

**Saxophone**

Hailed by *The New York Times* as a “virtuoso... one of the foremost saxophonists of his generation,” “brilliant” (*Guardian*, U.K.), and “a sterling saxophonist” (*The Baltimore Sun*), Timothy McAllister is one of today’s premier soloists, a member of the renowned PRISM Quartet, and a champion of contemporary music credited with dozens of recordings and more than 150 premieres of new compositions by eminent and emerging composers worldwide.

In August 2013, he gave the world premiere of John Adams’ Saxophone Concerto—described by the *Sydney Morning Herald* as “an astonishing performance”—with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra under the baton of the composer in The Sydney Opera House. Subsequent United States premieres and international performances throughout 2013 and 2014 occurred with Marin Alsop and the Baltimore and Sao Paulo State (Brazil) symphonies, along with a recording of the concerto and *City Noir* for Nonesuch Records with David Robertson and the St. Louis Symphony, which won the 2015 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. Other engagements with the concerto have included the BBC Proms with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, New World Symphony and the Cabrillo Festival Orchestra.

McAllister has recently been soloist with the Fort Wayne Philharmonic, Elgin Symphony, Albany Symphony Orchestra, Reno Philharmonic, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Royal Band of the Belgian Air Force, United States Navy
Band, Hong Kong Wind Philharmonia, Tokyo Wind Symphony, Pacific Symphony and Nashville Symphony, among others. An in-demand orchestral saxophonist, he has toured in the US and abroad with both the Los Angeles Philharmonic and Chicago Symphony Orchestra, among many others.

A renowned teacher of his instrument, he has served as Professor of Saxophone at Northwestern University, a Valade Artist Fellow for the Interlochen Center for the Arts, and is a clinician for the Conn-Selmer and D’Addario companies. In September 2014 he joined the faculty of the University of Michigan School of Music, succeeding his legendary mentor, Donald Sinta. McAllister’s work can be heard on the Nonesuch, Deutsche Grammphon, Naxos, OMM, Stradivarius, Centaur, AUR, Albany, Parma, New Dynamic, Equilibrium, New Focus and innova record labels.

ST. LOUIS SYMPHONY

Founded in 1880, the St. Louis Symphony is the second-oldest orchestra in the United States and is widely considered one of the world’s finest. In September 2005, internationally acclaimed conductor David Robertson became the 12th Music Director and second American-born conductor in the orchestra’s history. In its 136th season, the St. Louis Symphony continues to strive for artistic excellence, fiscal responsibility, and community connection. In addition to its regular concert performances at Powell Hall, the Symphony is an integral part of the St. Louis community, presenting free education and community programs throughout the region each year.

In February 2015 the St. Louis Symphony received a Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance for its recording of John Adams’s *City Noir* and Saxophone Concerto, on Nonesuch. This was the Symphony’s seventh Grammy, as well as its 57th nomination. The *City Noir* recording follows the 2009 Nonesuch release of the Symphony’s performances of Adams’ *Doctor Atomic Symphony* and *Guide to Strange Places*, which reached No. 2 on the Billboard rankings for classical music, and was named Best CD of the Decade”by *The Times of London*.

In 2013-14, David Robertson led the St. Louis Symphony in a Carnegie Hall performance of Britten’s *Peter Grimes* on the Britten centennial, which Anthony Tommasini, in *The New York Times*, selected as one of the most memorable concerts of the year. Recent tours have included the St. Louis Symphony’s first European tour with Music Director David Robertson in 2012, with performances at the BBC Proms, the Lucerne Festival, Paris’ Salle Playel and Musikfest Berlin. In 2013, the Symphony completed its second successful California tour with Robertson, which included a three-day residency at the University of California at Davis.
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