

NIGHT OUT

May 2, 2011



SOULFUL INSPIRATION
 Michael Tilson Thomas, pictured with a bust of Gustav Mahler in the Vienna Opera House, will appear there with the San Francisco Symphony May 21-25.

ALL COURTESY PHOTOS

By Janos Gereben
 Special to The Examiner

There are no tentative responses to Gustav Mahler's music. San Francisco Symphony Music Director Michael Tilson Thomas, 66, who first experienced it at age 13, calls it "this shattering joyous noise from a supreme symphonist — something that made me a different person."

Cellist Yo-Yo Ma was 15, he says, when Mahler's music hit him "like a bolt of lightning."

On the centenary of Mahler's death — he lived from 1860 to 1911 — his long, complex and supremely rewarding symphonies are being performed all over Europe. MTT and the San Francisco Symphony are among the composer's greatest advocates.

Following last month's — and continuing — Mahler blitz from the symphony's "Keeping Score" programs on TV, radio, DVD and CD, comes a 10-day Mahler festival in Davies Hall. Beginning Thursday, it's the fourth such event during MTT's 16 years at the head of the orchestra.

Soon after, from May 19-June 6,

IF YOU GO Mahler Festival

Presented by San Francisco Symphony

Where: Davies Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave., S.F.

When: 8 p.m. Thursday-Saturday and May 12-14, 2 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$15 to \$150

Contact: (415) 864-6000, www.sfsymphony.org

Thursday-Friday: Symphony No. 9

Saturday-Sunday: Symphony No. 2, "Resurrection"

May 12-14: Symphony No. 6, "Tragic"

the conductor and orchestra embark on a lengthy European tour, playing mostly Mahler.

They will perform in Prague (near the composer's birthplace) and Vienna, the center of Europe's Mahler celebrations. As the only American orchestra invited to Vienna for the events, it will play four of the 60 concerts scheduled in the Konzerthaus.

Other tour stops include Brussels, Luxembourg; Essen, Germany; Paris; Madrid; Barcelona, Spain;

ON TOUR

San Francisco Symphony violinist Dan Carlson, left, and oboist Jonathan Fischer.



and Lisbon, Portugal.

Mahler concerts in The City feature performances of three symphonies: No. 9, his farewell to life; the huge No. 2 ("Resurrection"); and No. 6, called the "Tragic."

What does it take to prepare for this jet-setter, Mahler-intensive month? In addition to the previous rehearsals, performances and recordings, the conductor and orchestra will spend at least an extra 10 hours in rehearsals in early May, and set aside time at each European

venue as needed.

The orchestra has completed recording the cycle of Mahler works, including the Adagio from the unfinished Symphony No. 10, and works for voice, chorus and orchestra. The cycle has won seven Grammy Awards, including three for Best Classical Album.

In addition to a 17-CD box set of all the recordings, a 22-album vinyl box set retails for \$750.

Musicians express only enthusiasm about playing Mahler, even as they cover familiar ground.

"Mahler does better than anybody, when he's combining these humble qualities of little forest animals or little village bands with the infinite," says principal clarinetist Carey Bell.

"Like most great composers, Mahler combines so many elements of human emotion. His music sometimes has a sacred quality to it, sometimes it's grotesque — he seems to be able to incorporate everything in a musical manner that is just so riveting and expressive and soulful," says principal trumpeter Mark Inouye.