

# **Hopkins Center for the Arts**

at Dartmouth

presents

# **Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra**

Filippo Ciabatti, conductor

With guest

Michelle Johnson, soprano

**Saturday, February 26, 7:30 pm**

Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College • 2022

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*Generously supported by the Roesch Family Fund in Support of Instrumental Ensembles and Friends of the  
Symphony Orchestra*

# Program

Approximate duration: 90 minutes

*Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, Op. 24

Samuel Barber (1910-1981)

Symphony No. 4 in G major

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911)

1. Bedächtig, nicht eilen (deliberate, unhurried)
2. In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast (in measured tempo, unhurried)
3. Ruhvoll, poco adagio (calm, somewhat slowly)
4. Sehr behaglich (at ease)

## Program Notes

### Samuel Barber

#### ***Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, Op. 24**

*Samuel Barber was born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on March 9, 1910, and died on January 23, 1981, in New York. Commissioned by American soprano Eleanor Steber, he wrote Knoxville: Summer of 1915 in 1947, setting text excerpted from a 1938 prose poem of the same name by Tennessee native James Agee (of A Death in the Family fame). Steber premiered the song in April of 1948 with Koussevitzky conducting the Boston Symphony. In the score, the solo soprano is accompanied by an orchestra of flute (doubling piccolo), oboe (doubling English horn), clarinet, bassoon, two horns, trumpet, triangle, harp and strings.*

Unlike his contemporary Aaron Copland, who famously turned to vernacular materials in pursuit of a populist musical language for the United States, Samuel Barber was not much one for musical nationalism. Though he shared Copland's concern for writing music accessible to broad audiences, Barber typically realized that mass-appeal ambition by maintaining the tried-and-true tonal harmony and expressive lyricism of 19th-century Europe. Against the works that earned Barber his conservative neo-Romantic reputation, then, *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*

stands out. Though Coplandesque quotations and transformations of cowboy folksong and Shaker hymnody (for instance) are nowhere to be found in this work, the result is unmistakable Americana nevertheless. Emulating the improvisatory prose poetry of James Agee's text, form and meter drift freely, unbothered by artificial constraint. Throughout, a melodic preference for the minor pentatonic scale gestures evocatively toward the modal palette of Southern Anglo- and African-American singing traditions. And just as the ostensibly youthful speaker of Agee's text tacks hazily between childlike naivety and the time-worn nostalgia and sorrowful foreknowledge of one much older, Barber's score suffuses the pastoral dreamscape of this unremarkable neighborhood evening with moments of dignity and passion—and an existential insecurity that borders on pain.

After a concise *Adagio* invocation from a woodwind trio echoed by strings, the orchestra establishes the main material, rocking gently in 12/8 to prefigure the opening lines of the soprano. Throughout this passage and the agitated streetcar scene which follows, Barber is liberal with word-painting (something of a musical analogue to onomatopoeia). Listen for the muted horn blare of "A loud auto" (and the echo effect for "a quiet auto"), the very literal "stopping, belling

and starting,” and the “bleak spark crackling and cursing” chromatically in high staccato winds, pizzicato strings and muted trumpet. Barber’s rendering of the final line of poetry provides the most striking moment of this whole ambivalent reverie. As the speaker trepidatiously grasps the ultimate powerlessness of home and family in the face of the cosmic loneliness of being (“But will not ever tell me who I am”), the soprano melody teeters forward, wide-eyed, vulnerable and alone in its precarious range. Distant arpeggiation in the harp and horns, far below, confirms the stark revelation; meanwhile, from infinite inky depths, the double basses evoke the unfathomable.

### **Gustav Mahler Symphony No. 4 in G major**

*Gustav Mahler was born in Kalischt (near Iglau), Bohemia, on July 7, 1860, and died in Vienna on May 18, 1911. He composed his Fourth Symphony in 1899-1900, revising it in 1905, 1901 and 1911. The text for the finale’s song, “Das Himmlische leben” (“The Heavenly Life”), is from Des Knaben Wunderhorn, Arnim and Brentano’s 1805 collection of (substantially rewritten, and in cases totally fabricated) German oral-traditional verse. The work premiered in Munich on November 25, 1901, with Mahler conducting the Kaim Orchestra (later to become the Munich Philharmonic). In addition to the solo soprano deployed in the fourth movement, the score calls for four flutes (3rd and 4th also piccolo), three oboes (3rd also English horn), three clarinets (2nd also E-flat clarinet, 3rd also bass clarinet), three bassoons (3rd also contrabassoon), four horns, three trumpets, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, tam-tam, triangle, sleigh bells, glockenspiel, harp and strings.*

When compared to the colossal dimensions and radically modernist designs of the first three symphonies of Mahler’s early period, his Fourth, at first glance, seems a milder and more restrained statement. After the five-movement, 90-minute immensity of the hugely successful Second Symphony

and the still-larger scope of the Third (100 minutes across six movements!), the Fourth with its four-movement scheme and concise (for Mahler) 60-odd minutes look downright breezy. Gone are the vividly programmatic movement titles and narrative conceits that explicitly tied the music of the first three to grand metaphysical visions (Mahler later rescinded these “to avoid giving rise to further absurd misunderstandings”). Absent too are the imposing ranks of trombones and tubas that invigorated the noble chorales and cataclysmic *tuttis* of the early symphonies. Though Mahler’s Fourth still calls for a large orchestra (woodwinds and percussion being especially plentiful), seldom do all the instruments sound at once. Instead, they link and recombine in chamber-proportioned webs to exploit the limitless coloristic possibilities of timbre, like a kaleidoscope deliberately and meticulously turned.

For these qualities, and for the impression of youthful innocence which pervades the work, the Symphony No. 4 earned its reputation as the most accessible of Mahler’s symphonies. It was the Fourth, championed by Bernstein and others, that sparked the “Mahler Renaissance” of the 1950s and 1960s and rescued his work from posthumous obscurity after the Nazis notoriously banned performances of his music (and that of other Jewish composers) during the Third Reich. Yet for the first three years of the Fourth Symphony’s performance history, the work was met with near-unanimous hostility from critics and audiences alike. Much of this antipathy can be chalked up to the ever-increasing anti-Semitism of turn-of-the-century Austrian and German journalism. Yet some of the denunciations, however snide, reacted to an undeniable fact: in this seemingly naive symphony, behind the childish visions of home and heaven, there is a work of stunning complexity, razor-sharp irony and lofty ambition—a fitting denouement to the monumental four-part whole which Mahler’s early symphonies comprise.

Sleigh bells and wintry woodwinds announce the opening *Bedächtigt, nicht eilen*, only to evaporate

## Program Notes *continued*

moments later in the leisurely warmth of the violins' nostalgic (almost Schubertian) primary theme. Simplicity, innocence and a sense of cozy domesticity pervade the whole exposition, which is neatly rounded off by a downright Neoclassical codetta. Terrors lurk in the bewildering and harmonically restless development section, though. After a dissonant fortissimo climax, a sinister trumpet fanfare (Mahler named it "the little summons") calls for order—or perhaps for repentance. Mahler enthusiasts will recognize this motif as the germ of the famous opening to his Fifth Symphony's funeral march.

Three eerie scherzos bizarrely counterposed by two lazy, sentimental Ländlers comprise the second movement. Playing the scherzos' grotesque protagonist is the *scordatura* solo violin, each string tuned a whole step higher than usual; in Mahler's never-published program for the symphony, this ghastly character is none other than Death the Fiddler (*Freund Hein* from German folklore). But in the slow third movement (marked *Poco adagio*), comprising a set of expansive variations on two heartbreaking themes, the enormous spiritual and psychological

scope of the symphony is finally revealed. In the coda, a blinding climax imparts a vision of the finale's main theme with all the triple-*forte* glory of horns and trumpets. As this revelation dwindles, Mahler explicitly quotes the final movement of his Second Symphony, a hushed promise of eternity in paradise.

Having caught a blazing glimpse of distant heaven through the third movement, in the symphony's finale we finally revel in the holy kingdom itself—or rather, a child's innocent vision of it. While the poetry ("Das Himmlische leben" from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*) is fittingly simple, Mahler's setting defies easy categorization. Listen in particular for the miniature time-suspending chorales that conclude the first, second and fourth verses of the text. Though the poetry is charmingly jejune here (bread-baking angels and all), the accompaniment, orchestrated differently each time, evokes utmost nobility. In the end, this child's vision of paradise remains just that, and the sublime dream gradually gives way to a gentle, untroubled slumber.

*Program notes © 2022 Grant Cook '19*

## About the Artists

A native of Florence, Italy, Filippo Ciabatti is the Music Director of the Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra, the Dartmouth Opera Lab and the Interim Music Director of the Dartmouth's Choral Ensembles. He is also the Artistic Director of the Upper Valley Baroque professional choral and instrumental ensembles. He is the recipient of the 2020 American Prize in Conducting (college/university division).

He has appeared as a guest conductor with opera companies and orchestras including Opera North (New Hampshire), Lyric Theatre at Illinois, Aurora Festival Orchestra (Stockholm, Sweden), Vermont Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra Toscana dei

Conservatori (Italy), ICM Orchestra and the Universidad Central Orchestra (Bogota, Colombia). He served as assistant conductor for the Portland Symphony Orchestra (Maine) and as chorus master and vocal coach for the Middlebury Opera (Vermont). In 2020, he also conducted a project with the Martha Graham Dance Company.

Artists with whom he has collaborated include the concertmaster of the Philadelphia Orchestra David Kim, American opera star Nathan Gunn, pianist Sally Pinkas, flutist Luciano Tristaino, mandolinist Carlo Aonzo and cellist Gabriel Cabezas. A passionate advocate for contemporary music and collaborations

between musical genres, he has premiered a secular oratorio composed by the renowned jazz composer Taylor Ho Bynum and commissioned a cello concerto by the composer Noah Luna, aired during the NPR show *From The Top*. In 2018, he led the Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra in an Italian tour in collaboration with the Orchestra Toscana dei Conservatori in prominent venues and festivals, including the Puccini Days in Lucca.

During the summer of 2018, he was invited to be a Conducting Fellow at the Aurora Music Festival in Stockholm, under the direction of Jukka-Pekka Saraste. During the festival, he conducted Hannah Kendall's 2017 composition, "The Spark Catchers", in a concert that also featured legendary cellist Mischa Maisky in the Konserthus Stockholm.

As a pianist and vocal coach, Mr. Ciabatti is on the faculty of Camerata de' Bardi, the Young Artists Program of Teatro Grattacielo in New York City, and of the summer opera programs "Opera Viva!" in Verona (Italy) and "Scuola Italia per Giovani Cantanti Lirici" in Sant'Angelo in Vado (Italy). He has played for masterclasses of Renée Fleming, Nathan Gunn, Isabel Leonard, William Matteuzzi, and Donald George. In Italy, he worked as vocal coach for the Cherubini Conservatory, Maggio Musicale Fiorentino and Florence Opera Academy.

Mr. Ciabatti holds degrees in piano, choral conducting and orchestral conducting from Italy and the United States.

Soprano **Michelle Johnson**, a Grand Prize Winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions where she was described as "a clear audience favorite" (New York Times), has been lavished with praise for her "extraordinary breath control and flawless articulation... Her voice is velvety and pliant—a dulcet dream."

A favorite of many houses, Ms. Johnson made recent returns to Lyric Fest, Sarasota Opera and Boston Landmark Orchestra. Ms. Johnson has also made a name for herself as one of the most in demand Aidas in the opera world today, performing Verdi's tragic heroine with Glimmerglass Music Festival, Opera Santa Barbara, Opera Columbus, Knoxville Opera, Opera Idaho and Sarasota Opera, among others. Ms. Johnson's debut with Columbus Symphony as soprano soloist in Verdi's Requiem was highly praised, and her collaboration with Madison Opera as Santuzza in their most recent production of *Cavalleria Rusticana* was given rave reviews.

A graduate of the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia, Boston University Opera Institute, and New England Conservatory, Ms. Johnson was seen as the title role in *Suor Angelica*, *Leonora in Oberto*, *Donna Anna in Don Giovanni*, the Countess in *Capriccio*, and *Alice Ford in Falstaff* during her educational tenure. In addition to winning a Grand Prize at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Ms. Johnson has also graced the winner's circle of the William Matheus Sullivan Foundation, Gerda Lissner Foundation and the Giulio Gari Foundation.

# Dartmouth Symphony Orchestra

Filippo Ciabatti, director  
Michelle Johnson, soprano soloist

## **Violin I**

Kimberly Tan '22, concertmaster  
Jessica Jiang '25  
Ida Claude '22  
Teddy Glover '25  
Sophia Chang Stauffer '22  
Julia Lee '24  
Hanlin Wang '21 G  
Zoe Hu '25  
*Kathy Andrew*  
*David Horak*  
*Ira Morris*  
*Melanie Dexter*

## **Violin II**

John Cho '22  
Jackson Spurling '23  
Matthew Kim '25  
Jessie Wang '23  
James Park '24  
Anna Kolln '22  
Jonathan Chiou '22  
*Greg Diehl*  
Helena Seo '25  
Marcia Cassidy F

## **Viola**

Jason Pak '24  
Anaïse Boucher-Browning '22  
Jehan Diaz '22  
Elaine Chi '25  
Katie Hoover '22  
Leslie Sonder F  
*Carrol Lee*

*Ana Ruesink*

*Noralee Walker*  
*Elizabeth Reid*

Cello

Owen Eskandari '22  
Hannah Kim '23  
Jack Ryan '23  
Ethan Hodess '25  
Elaine Young '22  
Aidan Lee '25  
Elizabeth Lee '24  
Hannah Spindler '23  
*John Dunlop F*  
*Kate Jensik*  
*Perri Morris*

## **Double Bass**

David Vargas Estrella '23  
Paul Horak TH '94  
*Luke Baker*  
*Eliot Porter*  
*Evan Runyon*

## **Flute**

*Laura del Sol Jiménez*  
*Laurel Ann Maurer*  
*Hillary Goldblatt (+ piccolo)*  
*Alison Hale (+ piccolo)*

## **Oboe**

*Michelle Farah*  
*Stuart Breczinski*  
*Jason Smoller (+ English horn)*

## **Clarinet**

*Nick Brown*  
Sangwon Lee (+ E-flat clarinet)  
*John Korajczyk (+ bass clarinet)*

## **Bassoon**

*Janet Polk F*  
*Lucy Langenberg '22*  
*Christopher Damon '22 (+*  
*contrabassoon)*

## **Horn**

*Michael Lombardi*  
*Patrick Kennelly F*  
*Joy Worland*  
*Adam Schommer*

## **Trumpet**

*Cheryl Przytula*  
*Adam Gautille*  
*Seelan Manickam*

## **Timpani**

*Nicola Cannizzaro*

## **Percussion**

*Sam Budish*  
*Rosina Cannizzaro*  
*Jared Soldiviero*  
*Michael Weinfield-Zell*

## **Harp**

*Hyunjung Choi*

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