

Meditations

Méditations

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Mélanie Léonard

With | Avec

Camerata NB

Special Guest | Invitée Spéciale

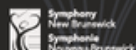
Nathalie Paulin, soprano

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Message from the President

REID PARKER



As a life-long admirer of Gustav Mahler's music, I am thrilled SNB is presenting an arrangement of Symphony no. 4 on this tour. It is the most approachable of this great master's ten (or eleven) symphonies (depending on how you count them). I have travelled far and wide to hear live performances of these works and it has been worth every dollar of the cost. They are symphonies that display the powerful emotions of a great genius and his reflections about the mysteries of life and death. The song which ends the Fourth may be interpreted in different ways, a mystery best solved by listening to Mahler's other masterpieces and reading about his life. But, be not afraid; the music of the Fourth is lyrical and enjoyable and I promise you a treat. But we begin with a short work by a composer new to me; but one with whom all music lovers will become more familiar with time. Peteris Vasks is touted by some as the world's finest living composer and I hope this small sample today will be the first of many.

As the Symphony's season nears its close, I urge everyone to reflect on how valuable this orchestra has become to the cultural identity of our Province. Those of us who help organize what happens on stage work hard to keep our wonderful musicians displaying their talent. I want to recognize Mélanie and her team, but also single out Peter Sametz and Gillian Gresh for their devotion and the long hours invested to keep things running. Our board of directors and volunteers, the federal and provincial governments, the Canada Council and our many sponsors, donors and patrons also deserve many thanks.

So, I will remind you that funding is the fuel which makes all this possible. The Symphony continues to do well; but both SNB and SNB Foundation need to close out the 2023 fiscal year on June 30 successfully. Your help is needed, so please contribute again if you can so that we can continue to support musicians, share dynamic performances, and bring high quality, beautiful music to the people of New Brunswick.

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Biography

MÉLANIE LÉONARD

Born in Montreal, Mélanie Léonard was most recently the music director of the Sudbury Symphony Orchestra. She has also been resident conductor and associate conductor of the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra.

She was invited to conduct at the Montreal International Jazz Festival and several Canadian orchestras including the Toronto Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Métropolitain, the National Arts Centre Orchestra, the Edmonton, Regina, Calgary and Winnipeg Symphony Orchestras and Symphony Nova Scotia.

Maestra Léonard has recorded soundtracks for Aura at Montréal's Notre-Dame Basilica; Land of Fantasy, a Cirque du Soleil show presented in Hangzhou, China; and Paradise City, an immersive multimedia universe in South Korea.

Mélanie Léonard was the first woman to complete a doctorate in orchestral conducting at the University of Montreal. In 2012, she received the Jean-Marie Baudet Prize in orchestral conducting awarded by the Canada Council for the Arts.





Welcome Message

MÉLANIE LÉONARD

In his work for strings Epifania, Péteris Vasks asks the question : "what remains at the end of a life full of music?"

In his 4th symphony, Mahler suggests an answer to what comes after life by putting into music a child's vision of heaven, sung in the last movement by a soprano. We are pleased to welcome back to her native province soprano Nathalie Paulin to perform this evocative symphony.

This concert presents composers as thinkers and philosophers and offers an opportunity to reflect while taking in the poignant colours of Vasks' work and the depth of Mahler's light, yet mystical Symphony no. 4.

FEATURING

Nathalie Paulin

SOPRANO



New Brunswick native Nathalie Paulin holds a Master's Degree from the Université de Montréal and has been teaching voice at the undergraduate and graduate levels at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Music since 2008. Nathalie has also been on faculty at the Vancouver International Song Institute, the Orford Music (Quebec), the Barachois Musical Summer Academy (New Brunswick), and at the Stratford Summer Music Vocal Academy.

Highly regarded for the breadth of her musical curiosity, Nathalie's prolific performance career has seen her engaged by all the major orchestras and opera companies of Canada, in America from Seattle to New York and from Chicago to Dallas, and internationally from Japan to the Netherlands. Her richly varied and critically lauded repertoire ranges from the title characters in Handel's *Semele* and *Theodora* and Beethoven's *Leonore*, to roles in Bizet's *Carmen* and Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, to Mahler's *Second Symphony* and Handel's *Messiah*, to modern works by Jacques Hétu, Claude Vivier, and Zad Moutaka.

Nathalie is a recipient of the prestigious Dvořák Prize from the Czech Academy of Classical Music, and the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts' Dora Mavor Moore Award for Outstanding Opera Performance. Her other accolades include awards and prizes from the Montréal Symphony Competition, the George London Foundation in New York, the Young Mozart Singers' Competition in Toronto, and the Canadian Music Competition.



IN MEMORY OF

Hilda Mae Parker 1907-1985

Hilda Mae Parker was the daughter of the late Thomas Wheatley Parker and Lilian Mary (Price) Parker, hailing originally from Birmingham UK. For many decades Thomas Parker was the well known press room foreman for the Moncton Times. His daughter, Hilda, was an early - grade elementary school teacher at Edith Cavell and Queen Elizabeth Schools in Moncton. She finished her teaching career in Rosemere, Quebec and retired to the family home on North Street in Moncton, NB. An inspiration to her students and her nephew, she was a life-long lover of great music, regularly attending concerts of the New Brunswick and Atlantic Symphonies in Moncton.

We dedicate the Moncton performance of "Meditations" to the memory of Hilda Mae Parker in honour of our President, Reid Parker, without whom we would not have the leadership and commitment that is essential to helping Symphony NB thrive today.

Program

Peteris Vasks (b. 1946)

Epifania

Gustav Mahler (1860 - 1911)

Symphony no.4

I. *Bedächtig, nicht eilen* (deliberate, unhurried)

II. *In gemächlicher Bewegung, ohne Hast* (in measured tempo, unhurried)

III. *Ruhevoll, poco adagio* (calm, somewhat slowly)

IV. *Sehr behaglich* (at ease)

Unauthorized recording or photographing of the Orchestra is prohibited.

Program Notes

BY REID PARKER

Peteris Vasks – Epifania

Contemporary Latvian composer Peteris Vasks is hard to musically pigeonhole. Some would call him a minimalist, but much of his music is more complicated than one would expect from a composer to whom this definition might apply. For those who don't know what the term means, minimalism is a musical style that embraces simplicity, repetition, drone bass lines and consonant (as opposed to dissonant) harmony. One might think of it as the opposite of serialism, the abstract, sometimes befuddling musical system based on chromatic twelve-tone rows embraced by Arnold Schoenberg and his followers. The repetition in some minimalist music can occasionally be painful to hear; but, written by an intelligent composer like Vasks, it can also be very beautiful and moving. While researching Vasks for this note, this writer stumbled over his *Da Pacem, Domine* for choir and string orchestra, a lovely elegiac piece that perhaps SNB might one day perform. His *Musica Serena* for strings is as beautiful, perhaps more so, than Barber's *Adagio*.

So, SNB will introduce Vasks by performing *Epifania*, also for strings, a short composition with some characteristics of minimalism, but, like many of Vask's works, is more complex. It embraces the same spirituality of the aforementioned compositions but embodies more agitated passion.

Gustav Mahler – Symphony no. 4

In a few short paragraphs, how does one write about Mahler's Fourth Symphony or, for that matter, any of his major works? The song ending the Fourth itself warrants a thesis! Mahler's biographer Henry Louis de la Grange spent his long life studying Mahler and his music and wrote almost 5,000 pages of very fine print and still had more to learn before he died in 2017.

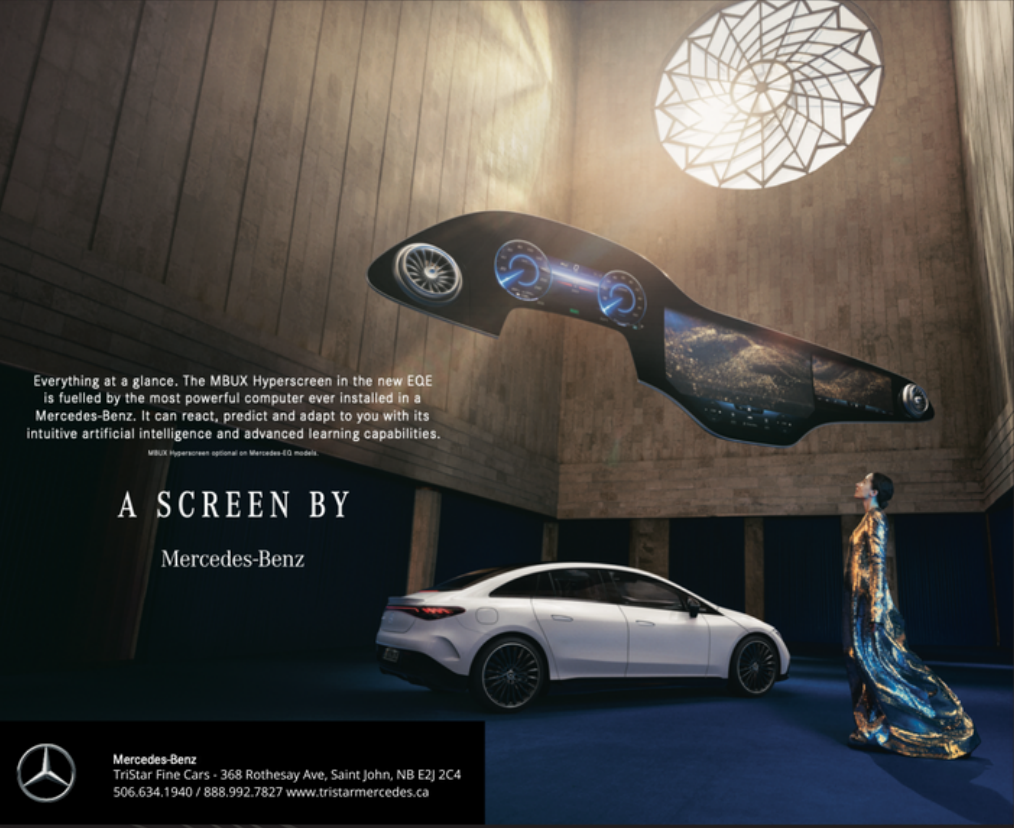
So, a few short facts and interpretations must suffice. Becoming less and less contentious is the statement that Mahler may be the greatest composer who ever lived and, if that is not true, then he certainly ranks with the best, including Beethoven. Mahler's symphonies are being performed around the world with a regularity rivalling those of the master from Bonn. Why not here? With a couple of exceptions, they require huge orchestras and, only by combining forces with Symphony Nova Scotia or the Quebec Symphony could some be attempted. The version of the Fourth to be heard on this tour is an arrangement for smaller ensemble, offering an appealing first step in bringing Mahler's symphonies to our stages.

All of Mahler's works are overtly autobiographical or contain some autobiographical elements. His symphonies, including the Fourth, are best understood with a knowledge of his life and philosophy. The Fourth is the climax of a story he began in his First Symphony. The first four are collectively called the Wunderhorn Symphonies, because all were inspired by an 1808 anthology of German poems and fantasies, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* ("The Youth's Magic Horn"), by Achim von Arnim (1781-1831) and Clemens Brentano (1778-1842). In these symphonies, Mahler wrestles with the great mysteries of life and death – why are we here and what is our destiny? In the Fourth, he reaches a conclusion of sorts which is reflected in the ending song *Das himmlische Leben* ("Heavenly Life"), the text taken from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*.

From the opening theme in the flutes accompanied by sleigh-bells, one realizes that Mahler's sound is very different. Though Mahler denied a program, there is unquestionable symbolism and hidden meaning throughout the symphony. What is the significance of the beginning of the second movement when, after a short introduction in the horn and flute, the Concertmaster plays the principal theme on a second violin tuned a whole-tone higher than normal? The dissonant sound has been variously explained as a drunken country fiddler playing a ländler or, alternatively, as a "Dance of Death", the latter description based on the original title of this part of the movement, *Freund Hein spielt auf* ("Death takes up the fiddle"). Behind the off-key violinist, the horn plays a separate theme in brilliant counterpoint, a harmonic juxtaposition sometimes suppressed by conductors who don't appreciate its importance.

The third movement is one of Mahler's saddest but most beautiful adagios. Bruno Walter, Mahler's understudy and friend, quoted the composer in describing the music, a theme and variations, "(he) told me the profound quiet of the slow movement was caused by a vision of a church sepulcher showing ... the deceased with the arms crossed in eternal sleep." The music progresses inexorably towards the great climax of the symphony which then subsides smoothly and quietly without pause into the final movement with its soprano solo.


Das himmlische Leben can be interpreted in a number of ways. Some think it is a child's happy vision of life in heaven. But this writer thinks the meaning is much darker. In the context of the *Wunderhorn* cycle, the song-movement is gentle satire and the descent into a minor key in the second verse and the final fade into nothingness suggest that redemption and an afterlife are elusive concepts. When hearing this symphony for the first time, it is best to ignore these extra-musical notions and just bask in the wonderful sound.



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Nathalie Paulin, soprano

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