

PRESS RELEASE
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28 March 2018

Songs of the Earth by Mahler and Ye Xiaogang (27 & 28 April)

Poems from Tang Dynasty that inspired two composers from two centuries and two countries

[28 March 2018, Hong Kong] The **Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HK Phil)** proudly presents two Songs of the Earth in one programme on **27 & 28 April** in the **Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall**. Alongside Mahler's famous settings in a German translation, native Chinese composer, Ye Xiaogang, presents the same seven ancient Chinese poems in their original language.

Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*, is a song cycle for tenor, contralto and orchestra based on seven poems from the Tang Dynasty which the composer only knew in a famous German translation. Ye Xiaogang decided to embark on his own settings of these same seven poems, also scored for male and female vocal soloists accompanied by a large orchestra, based on his great love for those original Chinese poems and his admiration for Mahler. "The feelings that Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* give to me are quite different from the feelings that those poems give to me", Ye says of his work, completed in 2005. "In my opinion, Mahler's music is full of disillusionment, but my work expresses a middle-aged man remaining ambitious about the world."

In 1907 Mahler's four-year-old daughter died of scarlet fever. Following this calamitous loss, Mahler himself suffered a mild heart attack and was advised to cut back on his workload. During this enforced rest, Mahler read a book in German translation called *The Chinese Flute* and selected seven of the poems by Li Bai, Qian Qi, Meng Haoran and Wang Wei to set to music. The "song-symphony" was completed in 1909 and has been described by Mahler expert Deryck Cooke as "music of indescribable beauty and poignancy [with] a new, naked kind of harmonic texture and orchestration which...is like no other in music".

The two linked pieces – Ye's in the first half, Mahler's after the interval - will be conducted by the HK Phil's Principal Guest Conductor [Yu Long](#) with renowned soloists [Yu Guanqun](#) (Soprano), [Ildikó Komlósi](#) (Mezzo-Soprano), [Klaus Florian Vogt](#) (Tenor) and [Yuan Chenye](#) (Baritone).

Tickets priced: HK\$580, \$380, \$280, \$180 are now available at [URBTIX](#). For enquiries, please call +852 2721 2332 or visit www.hkphil.org.

Artists

Yu Long, conductor [\[full biography\]](#)

The pre-eminent Chinese conductor with an established international reputation, Yu Long is currently Artistic Director of the Beijing Music Festival and the China Philharmonic Orchestra, Music Director of the Shanghai and Guangzhou Symphony Orchestras, the co-director of MISA Shanghai Summer Festival, and the Principal Guest Conductor of the HK Phil. Yu Long frequently conducts the leading orchestras and opera companies around the world. In 2010, he received an Honorary Academician from the Central Conservatory of Beijing for his great dedication to cultural exchanging and music development in China.

Yu Guanqun, soprano [\[full biography\]](#)

Soprano Yu Guanqun has gained international attention since winning the first prize at the International Hans Gabor Belvedere Singing Competition in 2008. In 2010 she made her debut in Honegger's *Jeanne d'Arc* under the baton of Bertrand de Billy at the Musikverein Wien. This was followed by Mimi (*La Bohème*) at the Pacific Festival in Sapporo conducted by Fabio Luisi and Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*) in Bologna. Yu's US debut at the Metropolitan Opera was in 2012 and in the same year she was awarded the Plácido Domingo Operalia Singing Competition. Yu just sang Liù in *Turandot* at Metropolitan Opera New York.

Ildikó Komlósi, mezzo-soprano [\[full biography\]](#)

Hungarian mezzo-soprano Ildikó Komlósi studied at the Franz Liszt Academy of Budapest and took part in the specialising courses of the Teatro alla Scala and Guildhall School of Music in London. She was winner of the Pavarotti International Competition in 1986 and made her debut in Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* opposite Luciano Pavarotti. In 2016 she received the highest honour, the Kossuth Prize from the Hungarian government. She continues to sing around the world at festivals and theatres including the Hungarian State Opera House, Verbier Festival, at the BBC Proms in London, and with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the US.

Klaus Florian Vogt, tenor [\[full biography\]](#)

Klaus Florian Vogt is one of the finest Wagner tenors of our time. Since his triumphant debut as Stolzing at the Bayreuth Festival in 2007 he has been a regular guest. He performed *Lohengrin* from 2011 until 2015, and in 2016 Bayreuth audiences saw him in the title role of a new production of *Parsifal*. In 2017 he performed Stolzing in the new production of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* directed by Barrie Kosky. February 2018 saw him on stage as Parsifal at the Metropolitan Opera New York. He has also established his reputation as a concert singer and as a fine interpreter of Lied.

Yuan Chenye, baritone [\[full biography\]](#)

Chenye Yuan won the gold medal at the 10th International Tchaikovsky Competition in 1994, and was a jury member at the 15th Competition in 2015. He has also won first prize at Mirjam Helin International Singing Competition in Finland and was a national winner at the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions in New York. He performed the role of Chou Enlai at Houston Grand Opera's 2017 production of *Nixon in China*. He will also play the role of Wen Tianxiang in the *Marco Polo* presented by Guangzhou Opera House in Beijing.

Ye Xiaogang, composer [\[full biography\]](#)

Xiaogang Ye (b. 1955) is currently the Vice President of Beijing's Central Conservatory of Music. He is now one of the most revered composers working in China and his pieces are deeply informed by his homeland's musical traditions as well as its geography. His compositions range from operas and symphonies to film scores and a piano concerto heard by three billion people when Lang Lang premiered it at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

SWIRE MAESTRO SERIES: SONGS OF THE EARTH

27 & 28 | 4 | 2018

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Artists

[Yu Long](#)

conductor

[Yu Guanqun](#)

soprano

[Ildikó Komlósi](#)

mezzo soprano

[Klaus Florian Vogt](#)

tenor

[Yuan Chenye](#)

baritone

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Yu Long



Yu Guanqun



Ildikó Komlósi



Klaus Florian Vogt
Photo Credit: Harald Hoffmann



Yuan Chenye



Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra
Photo Credit: Cheung Chi-wai

Programme

YE Xiaogang

The Song of the Earth

MAHLER

Das Lied von der Erde (The Song of the Earth)

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Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra

Music Director: Jaap van Zweden

Principal Guest Conductor: Yu Long

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra (HK Phil) is recognised as Asia's foremost classical orchestra. Presenting more than 150 concerts over a 44-week season, the HK Phil attracts more than 200,000 music lovers annually.

Jaap van Zweden, one of today's most sought-after conductors, has been the orchestra's Music Director since the 2012/13 concert season, a position he will continue to hold until 2022. Maestro van Zweden will be the next Music Director of the New York Philharmonic from the 2018/19 season.

Yu Long was appointed Principal Guest Conductor with the HK Phil for a three-year period commencing with the 2015/16 season.

Under the dynamic leadership of Music Director Jaap van Zweden, the HK Phil has attained new heights of artistic excellence, garnering international critical acclaim.

Following on from the success of the European tour which included a filmed concert from Vienna's Musikverein, the HK Phil has toured extensively within the mainland China. In celebration of the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the HKSAR, and with support of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Offices, the orchestra recently performed in Seoul, Osaka, Singapore, Melbourne and at the Sydney Opera House.

Jaap, the HK Phil, a superb cast of soloists and a chorus successfully completed the four-year epic "Ring Cycle" journey in January 2018. The concert performances and live Naxos recordings have been enthusiastically received by audiences and praised by critics at home and abroad. The recording of *Götterdämmerung* will be released towards the end of 2018.

Conductors and soloists who have recently performed with the orchestra include Vladimir Ashkenazy, Charles Dutoit, Christoph Eschenbach, Matthias Goerne, Stephen Hough, Lang Lang, Yo-Yo Ma, Ning Feng and Yuja Wang.

The HK Phil promotes the work of Hong Kong and Chinese composers through an active commissioning programme, and has released recordings on the Naxos label featuring Tan Dun and Bright Sheng, each conducting their own compositions. Its acclaimed education and community engagement programmes in schools, hospital and outdoor space, bring music into the hearts of tens of thousands of children and families every year.

The Swire Group has been the Principal Patron of the HK Phil since 2006. Through this sponsorship, which is the largest in the orchestra's history, Swire endeavours to promote artistic excellence, foster access to classical music and stimulate cultural participation in Hong Kong, and to enhance Hong Kong's reputation as one of the great cities of the world.

Thanks to a significant subsidy from the Hong Kong Government and long-term funding from Principal Patron Swire, the Hong Kong Jockey Club Charities Trust and other supporters, the HK Phil now boasts a full-time annual schedule of core classical repertoire and innovative popular programming, extensive education and community programmes, and collaborations with, among others, Opera Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Arts Festival.

Originally called the Sino-British Orchestra, it was renamed the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra in 1957 and became fully professional in 1974. The HK Phil is a charitable organisation.

The Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra is financially supported by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and is Venue Partner of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. SWIRE is the Principal Patron of the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.