

2 SEPTEMBER

WEDNESDAY SERIES 1

Helsinki Music Centre at 19

Sibelius

Hannu Lintu, conductor

Elina Vähälä, violin

Virpi Räsänen, mezzo-soprano

Jean Sibelius: Aallottaret (The Oceanides), Yale version 10 min

*Jean Sibelius: Violin Concerto in D Minor,
Op. 47, original version* 32 min

I Allegro moderato

II Adagio di molto

III Allegro, ma non tanto

INTERVAL 20 min

*Kalevi Aho: Symphony No. 16 for mezzo-soprano,
strings and percussion, fp (Yle commission)* 52 min

I Die Wanderstraßen (The roads I roam)

II Ein Zipfel dieser Welt (A corner of this world)

III Des Blinden Sehnsucht (Blind longing)

IV Weit verirrte Bilder (Far-straying images)

V Die Fahrende (The traveller)

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957): THE OCEANIDES, YALE VERSION

Sibelius had, it seems, been entertaining the idea of composing a work in the nature of *The Oceanides* for some time. At least he did not have to spend long searching for an idea when he did set to work on it. The original spark for a work about the sea may well have come from Debussy, whose triptych *La mer* in its myriad dazzling shades had been mesmerising the world for nearly a decade already. Fully aware of the fundamental differences between his style and that of the French Impressionists, Sibelius maybe wanted to see what would happen if he combined these two basic approaches, and to test the position and future of a composer from outside the musical hubs of Europe.

The Oceanides came at an extremely interesting juncture in Sibelius's output. He wrote it at a time when he was most closely embracing the trends of Central Europe. His natural spiritual home lay in the melancholy, sometimes even gloomy whirlpools of the mind, and he therefore felt a greater affinity with the predominantly dark soulscape of Expressionism than with the lighter contemporary Impressionism. This 'arctic' aspect of Sibelius generally tends to be underlined, but he was not without a more southerly component that produced *The Oceanides*, which, apart from a few small-scale pieces, was the only work of this kind he ever wrote.

The score of *The Oceanides* is a unique blend of symphonic treatment and hazy impression. But can it be classified as Impressionistic? The distinguished Sibelius scholar Erik Tawaststjerna said, "Yes and no", but then Impressionism may mean something different to the French or the Nordic listener.

JEAN SIBELIUS: VIOLIN CONCERTO, ORIGINAL VERSION

In composing his Violin Concerto, Sibelius was alternately blessed with moments of blissful inspiration, when exquisite strokes of genius would follow one another in quick succession, and moments of despair when he felt he was bashing his head against a brick wall over a form or a detail of content that refused to fall into place. The result would be fits of depression and drinking bouts in Helsinki when the hours would stretch into days and his wife Aino would be obliged to get out the horse and carriage and fetch him home.

There are, as we now well know, two versions of the Concerto. The biggest difference between them is the length and structure of the first movement. In the premiere recording of the original version, the first movement is three minutes longer than in the final version. Most of the themes are the same in both, the exception being the final motif in the exposition, the light rhythmic character of which gave way to a broad and passionate arch. In the origi-

nal version, Sibelius extracted considerable potential from this, but only little remains in the final one. The listener accustomed to the final version may be surprised at the “delayed entrance” of the secondary-theme motif, a lilting melody in the “Viennese” style. The whole transition is much smoother and more organic in the final version. The other major difference is the absence in the final version of the second, extensive and somewhat “Bach-like” cadenza. The bridge passage preceding the second cadenza, which Erkki Salmenhaara described as charmingly evocative of Mendelssohn, has likewise been deleted.

The finale is also considerably reduced – by about two minutes – in the revised version. Sibelius cut a lot of the virtuoso material (designed “in the spirit of revenge”?) from both the fast movements. The slow movement was for the most part spared. Despite the arguments that have raged round the merits of the various versions, most would agree that the revisions were clearly for the better and Sibelius was right to make them. The prototypes of great masterpieces are nevertheless extremely interesting both from a general historical perspective and as a reflection of their composer’s personal development.

Jouni Kaipainen

KALEVI AHO (B. 1949): SYMPHONY NO. 16

My sixteenth Symphony begun at the end of November 2013 and finished in February 2014 is scored for a large string orchestra, four percussionists and mezzo-soprano. This line-up was, incidentally, the wish of conductor Hannu Lintu, except that I also wanted a mezzo-soprano for the finale. The percussion section here consists of not only the basic symphony orchestra instruments but also many unusual ones such as bell plates, a djembe, darabuka, ocean drum, spring drum, binzasara (a Japanese rattle), dobaci (a Chinese-Japanese temple bell) and Chinese moon gong.

When the work was already well under way, I came across the poem *Die Fahrende* (The Traveller) by the German poet Gertrud Kolmar (1894–1943). This provided the text for the finale and the titles of all the movements.

The first movement (*Die Wanderstraßen*) begins with a powerful melody in the double basses and a portentous motif on the bell plates. The calm initial tempo gradually increases and the movement culminates in a wild Presto passage in 5/4 time with some virtuosic percussion solos. From here the music gradually calms down, arriving back at the initial tempo again in the final bars.

The second movement (*Ein Zipfel dieser Welt*) begins in expectant mood, and mysteriously. Whereas in the first movement the stringed instruments mainly perform in homogeneous groups, in

the second they are often divided, so that almost every player has a different part. The movement nevertheless also has some passionate and impassioned unison string melodies. The Allegretto section in the latter half of the movement in unreal mood is dominated by percussion instruments.

The third movement (*Des Blinden Sehnsucht*) builds up in waves to the most emotionally-charged and most passionate climax of the whole Symphony, thereafter calming down and fading away.

The fourth movement (*Weit verirrte Bilder*) is quick. It proceeds throughout in restrained tones, and the strings are often divided. Many individual players have their own little solos in this movement. The title I found in a poem by Gertrud Kolmar corresponds closely to the sense of unreality.

The soft beginning of the finale (*Die Fahrende*) is dominated by percussions. The main instrument is the Chinese moon gong, the slightly tam tam-like sound of which gives the finale a ritualistic basic mood. A little later, the percussions and strings are joined by a slow, wordless vocalise sung by a mezzo-soprano off-stage. She then comes on to the stage and sings *Die Fahrende*. Having sung this poem and thus verbalised her message, she exits. The end is, like the beginning, dominated by ritualistic booms on the moon gong, joined right at the end by the mezzo-soprano heard from afar, singing the last wordless line.

Kalevi Aho

HANNU LINTU

Hannu Lintu took over as Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in August 2013, thus continuing his long collaboration with the orchestra. During the 2015/2016 season he will conduct 15 concerts at the Helsinki Music Centre and take the orchestra on tour to Japan and Austria.

Formerly Artistic Director of the Tampere Philharmonic Orchestra and Chief Conductor of the Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra, Hannu Lintu has also been Principal Guest Conductor of the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra in Dublin. He works regularly with the Avanti! Chamber Orchestra and was Artistic Director of its Summer Sounds festival in 2005.

Outside Finland, Maestro Lintu has guest conducted the London Philharmonia, the BBC Scottish, Cleveland, Houston, Minnesota, Detroit and St. Louis Symphonies, the Leipzig and Cologne Radio Symphony Orchestras, the Lyon National Orchestra and many others. Guest engagements in the 2015/2016 season include appearances with the Iceland and Baltimore Symphony Orchestras, the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra and the Seoul Philharmonic. In May 2016 he will return to the Finnish National Opera to conduct Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. His previous experience of opera includes *Aulis Sallinen's Kullervo* at the 2014 Savonlinna Opera Festival and *Tannhäuser* at Tampere Opera in 2012. He has recorded the

opera *Mare and her Son* by Tauno Pyykkänen with the Estonian National Opera. Hannu Lintu has released many discs on the Ondine, Naxos, Avie and Hyperion labels. His most recent dates from summer 2015, when he recorded the Tchaikovsky and Mendelssohn violin concertos with Fumiaki Miura and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. Many of the discs featuring him as the conductor have won awards both at home and abroad, and his premiere recording of the opera *The Mine* by Einojuhani Rautavaara was nominated for a Grammy. With the FRSO he has recorded works by Fagerlund, Berio, Messiaen and others. The disc of the violin concerto and orchestral works by György Ligeti (2013) was Gramophone's Editor's Choice in February 2014. During the 2015/2016 season Hannu Lintu and the FRSO will record works by Lindberg, Melartin, Prokofiev and others.

Hannu Lintu studied the piano and cello first at the Turku Conservatory in his native Finland and later the Sibelius Academy, where he also attended the conducting class taught by Jorma Panula, Atso Almila, Eri Klas and Ilja Musin. He has further been tutored by, among others, Myung Whun Chung at the Music Academy Siena. In 1994 he was the winner of the Nordic Conducting Competition.

ELINA VÄHÄLÄ

Elina Vähälä is one of the brightest Finnish stars on the international firmament. Only 12 when she made her

solo debut with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, she was the winner of the prestigious Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1999. Her New York debut in the same year also got an excellent review in the *New York Times*.

In addition to the leading Finnish orchestras, Elina Vähälä has been the soloist with, among others, the Minnesota Orchestra, Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra and Nashville Symphony Orchestra and worked with Leonard Slatkin, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Okko Kamu, Jakob Hrusa, Thierry Fischer, Leif Segerstam and many other distinguished conductors. In December 2008 she was chosen to perform at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and concert.

Solo engagements this season include appearances with the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra conducted by Sakari Oramo, a tour of Central Europe with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra, and of the USA with the Buffalo Philharmonic and the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra. She will also make her debut with the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra and the Strasbourg Philharmonic. Highlights of last season included concerts with the Nashville and Detroit Symphonies and a US tour with the Festival Pablo Casals Prades Collective.

With pianist-conductor Ralf Gothóni, Elina Vähälä has premiered the Chamber Concerto by Aulis Sallinen and the Double Concerto by Curtis Curtis-Smith. She also gave the first Nordic performance of the Violin Concerto by

John Corigliano and in spring 2012 premiered a Concerto she had commissioned from Jaakko Kuusisto.

Among Elina Vähälä's many chamber music partners are Yuri Bashmet, Ana Chumachenco, Ralf Gothóni, Bruno Giuranna, Jan-Erik Gustafsson, Gary Hoffman, Steven Isserlis, Frans Helmerson, Paavali Jumppanen, Jaakko Kuusisto, Cho-Liang Lin, Arto Noras, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Alisa Weilerstein. In 2009 Elina Vähälä launched the Violin Academy funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and she is a Professor of the Violin at the Karlsruhe University of Music.

Elina Vähälä plays a Giovanni Battista Guadagnini violin from 1780.

VIRPI RÄISÄNEN

Mezzo-soprano Virpi Räisänen studied at the Utrecht and Amsterdam Conservatories in the Netherlands and the Sibelius Academy in Finland. In summer 2009 she made her debut at the Salzburg Festival in Luigi Nono's opera *Al gran sole carico d'amore* and was invited back for summer 2010 for the premiere of Wolfgang Rihm's opera *Dionysos*; she also sang this at the Dutch National Opera and the Berlin State Opera. Other roles in her repertoire include Elmira in Handel's *Floridante*, the double roles of the Muse and Niklausse in Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann*, Orfeo in Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Iseut aux blanches mains in Martin's *Le Vin Herbé*. At the 2013 Helsinki Festival she sang Maija in Uljas Pulkkis's opera *Five Women in a Chapel*

and at the 2014 Schwetzingen Festival *Daphne* in Hesse's *Leucippo*.

Virpi Räisänen has sung with many orchestras, among them the French Radio Philharmonic, the German Symphony, the Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, the Gulbenkian Orchestra, the European Union Chamber Orchestra, the Ostrobothnian Chamber Orchestra, the Tapiola Sinfonietta and the Helsinki Philharmonic, and with many chamber ensembles at venues such as the Amsterdam Concertgebouw, the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris, the Aix-en-Provence Festival and the Musicus Fest Hong Kong. She has sung Lieder in Finland, Central Europe, Hong Kong and Japan. Known for her renderings of contemporary music, she has premiered several dozen works, many of them written for and dedicated to her. In 2012 she released her debut disc *The Legacy of Mahler (Ondine)* with pianist Marita Viitasalo. Virpi Räisänen has been Artistic Director of the Oulunsalo Soi chamber music festival since 2012.

THE FINNISH RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (FRSO) is the orchestra of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle). Its mission is to produce and promote Finnish musical culture and its Chief Conductor as of autumn 2013 has been Hannu Lintu. The FRSO has two Honorary Conductors: Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Sakari Oramo.

The Radio Orchestra of ten players founded in 1927 grew to symphony orchestra strength in the 1960s. Hannu Lintu was preceded as Chief Conductor by Toivo Haapanen, Nils-Eric Fougstedt, Paavo Berglund, Okko Kamu, Leif Segerstam, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Sakari Oramo.

In addition to the great Classical-Romantic masterpieces, the latest contemporary music is a major item in the repertoire of the FRSO, which each year premieres a number of Yle commissions. Another of the orchestra's tasks is to record all Finnish orchestral music for the Yle archive. During the 2015/2016 season it will premiere six Finnish works commissioned by Yle. The programme will also include Piano Concertos by Beethoven and Prokofiev, Symphonies by Schumann and Brahms, and Mendelssohn's oratorio *Elijah*. Among its guest artists will be pianists Murray Perahia, Nelson Freire and Andrés Schiff, conductors David Zinman, Tugan Sokhiev and Manfred Honeck, soprano Karita Mattila and mezzo-soprano Anne Sofie von Otter.

The FRSO has recorded works by Ligeti, Eötvös, Nielsen, Hakola, Lindberg, Saariaho, Sallinen, Kaipainen, Kokkonen and others, and the debut disc of the opera *Aslak Hetta* by Armas Launis. Its discs have reaped some prestigious distinctions, such as the BBC Music Magazine Award, the Académie Charles Cros Award and a MIDEM Classical Award. The disc of the Sibelius and Lindberg Violin Concertos was Gramophone magazine's Editor's Choice in February 2014.

The FRSO regularly tours to all parts of the world. One of the many highlights of the 2015/2016 season will be tours to Japan and Austria with conductor Hannu Lintu.

The home channel of the FRSO is Yle Radio 1, which broadcasts all its concerts, usually live, both in Finland and abroad. Its concerts can also be heard and watched with excellent live stream quality on the FRSO website (www.yle.fi/rso), and the majority of them are televised live on the Yle Teema channel.