

6.12.2022
HELSINKI MUSIC CENTRE AT 15:00

**INDEPENDENCE DAY
GALA CONCERT**

JUKKA-PEKKA SARASTE
CONDUCTOR

CAROLIN WIDMANN
VIOLIN

Jean Sibelius: *5 min*
All'overtura from the suite Scènes historiques I, Op. 25

Veli-Matti Puumala: *35 min*
*Violin Concerto Tree of Memories (2015–2020),
fp (Yle commission)*

INTERVAL 20 MIN

Jean Sibelius:
Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, Op. 39

38 min

1. *Andante, ma non troppo – Allegro energico*
2. *Andante (ma non troppo lento)*
3. *Scherzo: Allegro*
4. *Finale (Quasi una fantasia)*

*Interval at about 15:45. The concert will end at about 17:00.
Broadcast live on Yle Areena and Yle Teema.*

JEAN SIBELIUS: ALL'OVERTURA FROM THE SUITE SCÈNES HISTORIQUES I

Finland's striving for political independence gained added impetus in February 1899 when Tsar Nicholas II issued a manifesto designed to limit Finland's autonomous Grand Duchy status as part of Imperial Russia. The manifesto unleashed a wave of protests to which Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) contributed with music. The best-known example was the music he composed for the Press Days held in 1899 as a protest against censorship and which sowed the seed of both the *Scènes historiques* and *Finlandia*.

The *Scènes historiques* date from 1911–1912 and are not mere arrangements of the Press Days music. Sibelius took three of the items for the compact first suite. *All'overtura* is based on a tableau in which wise old Väinämöinen, the leading character in the national epic *The Kalevala*, enchants nature and the people with his playing. Sibelius does not seek to imitate the sound of the instrument played by Väinämöinen, a kantele, and instead wrote sumptuous orchestral music featuring cleverly terraced brass.

VELI-MATTI PUUMALA: VIOLIN CONCERTO TREE OF MEMORIES

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Veli-Matti Puumala was born in 1965 in the small Finnish town of Kaustinen famous for its folk music. He studied with Paavo Heininen at the Sibelius Academy, where he is now himself Professor of Composition, and with Franco Donatoni in Sienna, Italy. He first made his mark in the 1990s with Modernist works for orchestra, and composed a concerto, *Tao*, for double bass in 2000 and for piano, *Seeds of Time*, in 2004.

Says Puumala of his new concerto: “The violin is my first instrument and familiar to me in many ways. The idea of the violin as the soloist in a large-scale work was nevertheless challenging. In the end I arrived at two simple principles. Firstly, the soloist must in some way be at the centre of the action. Secondly, I debated the relationship

between the soloist and the orchestra and settled on the idea of coexistence.

“I began by outlining the time scheme. My original plan was for a piece in six movements performed without a break. The final work to some extent recalls this idea, but the process and cyclic dimensions now occupy a larger role.

“The themes revolve round memory and remembering, and the loss of memories. The work begins by presenting various motifs that follow quickly upon one another and are then repeated and varied. Some of the motifs are discarded, forgotten along the way. The form of the work thus resembles the life cycle.

“My father fell ill while I was writing the concerto and I was witness to his decline. *Tree of Memories* is dedicated to his mem-

ory. It is also dedicated to Carolin Widmann, because her way of interpreting music was a great source of inspiration for me throughout the composition process and I can imagine her playing every single bar of the solo part.”

JEAN SIBELIUS: SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR

Life was not easy for a young composer in Finland in the 1890s. The nation fighting for its constitutional rights needed a culture of its own, and music here had a major part to play – music that would show other nations that Finland belonged to the European cultural domain.

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People looked to Sibelius, hailing him as the father of a national, Finnish brand of music. Various political factions sought to manipulate him. The Swedish-speaking press tried to make him a pan-European symphonist, the nationalists saw him as the voice of *The Kalevala* and the Finno-Ugric heritage, while the liberal-right wing called for catchy pieces on topical subjects, grasping at the historic moment. Sibelius was aware of the difficulties that lay in his path.

Finnish audiences interpreted the E minor symphony of 1899 as a reflection of the nation's suffering, but also of the

starkly beautiful scenery and the fight for autonomy. They heard what they wanted to hear, and Sibelius tried in vain to tell them that the symphony did not have a programme. Its premiere in 1899 was a huge success.

The E minor symphony has many elements still at the experimental stage, one of them being the choice of instruments. The cymbals, triangle, bass drum and tuba give the forte climaxes an operatic panache that at the same time embodies the symphony's fighting spirit. The emotions vacillate impulsively and the finale of the impassioned opening movement is veritably melodramatic. The landscape is bleak, but fresh and plausible.

Programme notes by Antti Häyrynen translated (abridged) by Susan Sinisalo

JUKKA-PEKKA SARASTE

One of the outstanding conductors of his generation, Jukka-Pekka Saraste most recently served as Chief Conductor of the WDR Symphony Orchestra in Cologne from 2010 to 2019. Chief Conductor of the

FRSO 1987–2001, he is now the orchestra's Conductor Laureate. He is also a frequent guest with top orchestras in Europe, the United States and Asia, and he is now increasingly venturing into opera.

Earlier positions include the principal conductorships of the Scottish Chamber Orchestra 1987–1991 and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra 1994–2001. Saraste was Music Director and Chief Conductor of the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra 2006–2013 and subsequently appointed its Conductor Laureate, and was Artistic Advisor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra 2008–2011. He is still the Artistic Advisor of the Finnish Chamber Orchestra founded by him and of its summer festival. This year, he has also been the initiator of an international orchestra project called LEAD! providing training and guidance for young conductors and players.

Saraste has a repertoire extending from the great masterpieces of the Classical and Romantic eras right up to the present day and music by such composers as Dutilleux, Lindberg, Salonen and Saariaho. He has conducted numerous premieres of works by both Finnish composers and others such as Rihm, Cerha and Dusapin. His extensive discography includes the complete symphonies of Beethoven and Brahms with the WDR Symphony Orchestra and works by, among others, Bruckner, Mahler, Stravinsky and Schönberg. The complete cycles of Sibelius and Nielsen symphonies also rank among his major achievements.

CAROLIN WIDMANN

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Carolin Widmann is equally at home in a great Classical-Romantic concerto as in a contemporary work composed specially for her, a solo recital, a chamber ensemble or as conductor-player in a performance on period instruments. A German violinist, she has done projects involving other arts and in 2019, for example, took part in one with performance artist Marina Abramović. Since 2006, she has been Professor of the Violin at the University of Music and Theatre Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy in Leipzig.

Solo engagements have taken Carolin Widmann all over the world, to perform with orchestras such as the Berlin Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, the Scottish Chamber and the Orpheus Chamber in New York. Among the composers who have written works for her are Pierre Boulez, Peter Eötvös, Wolfgang Rihm, Salvatore Sciarrino, Rebecca Saunders and

now Veli-Matti Puumala. She has premiered works written for her by her brother Jörg Widmann, including his second Violin Concerto.

Widmann's debut album (2006) of works by Boulez, Ysaÿe, Sciarrino and Jörg Widmann was named Critics' Choice of the Year by the German Record Critics. Her recent solo disc *L'Aurore* (2022) likewise combines composers writing in a variety of styles. Her recording of the Mendelssohn and Schumann concertos with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, as both soloist and conductor, won the 2016 Classical Music Award, and she has also recorded music by Schubert, Zimmermann, Schönberg, Tüür and others.