

**18.3. AT 19:00
FRIDAY SERIES¹²
HELSINKI MUSIC CENTRE**

MARK WIGGLESWORTH
CONDUCTOR

ISTVÁN VÁRDAI
CELLO

Helen Grime:
Virga

Dmitri Shostakovich:
Cello Concerto No. 2 in G Minor, Op. 126
1. *Largo*
2. *Allegretto*
3. *Allegretto*

INTERVAL 20 MIN

Ralph Vaughan-Williams:
Symphony No. 5 in D
1. *Preludio: Moderato – Allegro – Tempo I*
2. *Scherzo: Presto misterioso*
3. *Romanza: Lento*
4. *Passacaglia: Moderato – Allegro – Tempo primo – Tempo del Preludio*

Interval at about 19.50. The concert will end at about 21.00. Broadcast live on Yle Radio 1 and Yle Areena and, delayed, from 20 on Yle Teema. Repeat on Yle TV 1.

HELEN GRIME: VIRGA

“My language is detailed and intricate. I am drawn to rich harmonies, initially influenced by Messiaen, Takemitsu and Boulez, and long expressive musical lines. I love to create different layers in my music and often slow music exists at the same time as fast music. Clarity and focus, as well as a dedication to always get exactly the right notes, are always paramount for me.”

This is how Scottish composer Helen Grime (b. 1981) described her music on Frances Wilson’s *Meet the Artist* website in 2019. She first made news in 2003, on winning the British Composer Award with an oboe concerto in which she was the soloist. At the time, she was studying the oboe and composition at the Royal College of Music in London. Since 2017, she has been Professor of composition at the Royal Academy of Music.

Helen Grime is known mainly for her orchestral and chamber works. Her earliest piece in the former category was *Virga* (2007), commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra. She is often inspired by some extra-musical phenomenon, and in this case the title alludes to precipitation that falls from a cloud but evaporates before it reaches the ground. *Virga* is a densely-packed miniature, its textures dominated by falling cascades of woodwind droplets, strings in full spate and sustained melodies, comments from the brass and glittering harp, celesta and percussions. The textures get denser as the work reaches its peak, followed by a solo melody on the first violins initially presented as such and then in other sections of the orchestra. Finally, the music evaporates into silence like a streak of rain dispersing in the air.

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH: CELLO CONCERTO NO. 2

In 1943, Dmitri Shostakovich (1906–1975) made the acquaintance of Mstislav Rostropovich. The 16-year-old cellist had just begun studying at the Moscow Conservatory. They quickly became both friends and collaborators and together performed Shostakovich’s works, such as the Cello Sonata of 1934. The finest testaments of their partnership are the two Cello Concertos which Shostakovich composed and dedicated to Rostropovich, the first in 1959 and the second in 1966. Rostropovich premiered the latter at Shostakovich’s 60th birthday concert;

the composer had by that time suffered a major heart attack but was able to be present.

The second Cello Concerto is, like many of Shostakovich’s later works, rather ‘pared down’. The solo part is less virtuosic than in the first, but musically, it indisputably occupies the leading role. The sparse impression is enhanced by the small ensemble – double woodwinds but only French horns in the brass – yet various percussions.

The mood of the meditative opening movement is grave. Around the middle, it

becomes more dance-like before coming to a head, and bass-drum beats accompany the recapitulation of the opening section, which takes the form of a monologue on the cello.

The middle movement is a short Scherzo based on an Odessa street song. It grows out of solo comments on the

French horn, building up to a climax before segueing straight into the final movement, heralded by fanfares. These conjure up an infernal dance, a return to the Odessa street song, now in a grotesque variation, before dying away with a passage coloured by percussions.

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: SYMPHONY NO. 5

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958) was a major contributor to the rise of British music beginning with Edward Elgar in the late-19th century. Whereas Elgar sought inspiration in the Late Romanticism of Central Europe, Vaughan Williams turned to his own national heritage, folk tunes and the Tudor vocal music tradition. He finished his fifth symphony in 1943, while the Second World War was still raging, yet it is the most peaceful and popular of all the nine symphonies he wrote between 1909 and 1958. Had he not already given his third the title “Pastoral”, this would have suited the fifth.

Vaughan Williams dedicated the symphony “without permission” to Sibelius, who hastened to accept the honour. Sibelius first heard the symphony in September 1943, on the Swedish Radio, and was greatly impressed. “Culture and rich humanity,” he wrote in his diary. “I am deeply flattered.”

That the symphony avoids external drama is evident from the very first bars. Dominating the first movement is a tranquil melody. The development acquires a veil of mystery but nevertheless culminates in disquiet. The second movement is a lively but restrained Scherzo. The third movement, Romanza, is the symphony’s emotional core. It is melancholy yet impassioned music coloured by wind solos. The finale features a passacaglia (a set of variations) on a theme introduced by the cellos that, at the end, retreats into a peaceful world of its own.

*Programme notes by Kimmo Korhonen
translated (abridged) by Susan Sinisalo*

MARK WIGGLESWORTH

According to Mark Wigglesworth in a publication entitled *The Oxford Blue* in March 2020, “Music is an international language that knows no borders. In a time in which petty nationalism appears to be such a force, I hope that music can offer solace to all who wish to remain culturally respectful and globally connected. And more importantly, serve as a tool to help people look outwards and celebrate the diversity and equality that is the essence of the human species.” Indeed, Wigglesworth has always underlined the importance of community in his work at opera houses and concert halls.

Not confined solely to British ensembles, Wigglesworth has conducted far and wide: the Berlin Philharmonic, the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra, the Tokyo Symphony and top US orchestras (New York, Philadelphia,

Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.). He has been Principal Guest Conductor of the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra since November 2021.

Wigglesworth has close ties with English National Opera (ENO). He made his Covent Garden debut in 2002 and has appeared at, among others, the New York Metropolitan, Opéra National de Paris, Bavarian State Opera and Teatro Real, Madrid. In 2017, he received the Laurence Olivier Award for his performances of *Don Giovanni* and *Lulu*. His discography includes works by Brahms, Wagner, Mahler, Vaughan Williams and Khachaturian, Britten’s opera *Peter Grimes* and the complete Shostakovich symphony cycle. Also an active writer, Wigglesworth is the author of the highly-acclaimed *The Silent Musician: Why Conducting Matters* (2018).

ISTVÁN VÁRDAI

The rise of Hungarian István Várdai to the ranks of the world cello elite has been accelerated by prizes in many competitions. He has built up an active career as a soloist and chamber musician, appearing with the Russian National Orchestra, Geneva Chamber Orchestra, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, Bavarian Radio Symphony and many other top orchestras, and been Artistic Director of the Franz Liszt Chamber Orchestra since 2020.

Várdai’s partners in chamber repertoire have included András Schiff, Yuri Bashmet, Gidon Kremer, Jean-Efflam

Bavouzet, Mischa Maisky, Jörg Widmann and Víkingur Olafsson. Together with violinist Kristóf Baráti he directs the Kaposfest Chamber Music Festival in Hungary, and he has been Professor of the cello at the Vienna University of Music and Performing Arts since 2019.

Várdai has a repertoire that ranges from Bach to Saariaho. Since his debut disc in 2009, he has released CDs of the Bach Suites for solo cello, and music by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Elgar, Janáček, Prokofiev, Martinů and others. He plays the “Ex du Pré-Harrell” Stradivari from 1673.

THE FINNISH RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (FRSO) is the orchestra of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle), and its mission is to produce and promote Finnish musical culture.

The Radio Orchestra of ten players founded in 1927 grew to symphony orchestra proportions in the 1960s. Its Chief Conductors have been Toivo Haapanen, Nils-Eric Fougstedt, Paavo Berglund, Okko Kamu, Leif Segerstam, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Sakari Oramo, Hannu Lintu, and as of autumn 2021 Nicholas Collon.

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. During the 2021/2022 season it will premiere six new works.

Another of the orchestra's tasks is to record all Finnish orchestral music for the Yle archive.

The FRSO has recorded works by Mahler, Bartók, Sibelius, Hakola, Lindberg, Saariaho, Sallinen, Kaipainen, Kokkonen and others. It has twice won a Gramophone Award: for its disc of Lindberg's Clarinet Concerto in 2006 and of Bartók Violin Concertos in 2018. Other distinctions have included BBC Music Magazine, Académie Charles Cros, MIDEM Classical awards and Grammy nominations in 2020 and 2021. Its disc of tone poems and songs by Sibelius won an International Classical Music Award (ICMA) in 2018, and it has been the recipient of a Finnish EMMA award in 2016 and 2019.

FRSO concerts are broadcast live on the Yle Areena and Radio 1 channels, and later on the same evening on the Yle Teema TV channel. Recordings of the concerts are also shown on Yle TV 1.