Having recovered from the lock-out, Minnesota Orchestra will perform on Sunday in Lahti with Vänskä and Pekka Kuusisto – the duo is planning fun and amusement for encores

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http://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/a1471576970286?jako=14ea69493d09960242494af94112b054&ref=tw-share
(Finnish to English translation provided by Kirsi Ritosalmi-kisner)

“There’s never been too much frolic in classical music” says Osmo Vänskä, the Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra.

The 63-year-old world star will bring his US orchestra to Lahti’s Sibelius Hall this Sunday as the first stop on the European tour. The concert will surely be sold out. By Friday afternoon there were only ten tickets left. The program consists of music from American composer Steven Stucky, and Sergei Prokofiev’s First Violin Concerto with Pekka Kuusisto as the soloist. The orchestra will also perform Beethoven’s Third Symphony *Eroica*, which was chosen as the “Best Symphony in the World” in a BBC Music Magazine survey, voted in by 151 international conductors.

“We have two special strengths, because both our Beethoven and Sibelius symphony cycle recordings have been very favorably received”, Vänskä says. This time, during the visit to Finland, it is Beethoven’s turn.

That frolic may take place during encores. In his Helsingin Sanomat interview Pekka Kuusisto indicated that he and Vänskä are considering some kind of a fun co-encore for the European tour. Will it be worth waiting for something like that in Lahti? “Maybe it is”, smiles Vänskä. “But these things are not told in advance, nor are they always even planned beforehand.”

Kuusisto charmed the BBC Proms Festival with his *Minun kultani kaunis on* [My darling is beautiful] encore and got the audience to sing with him. For the fans of Pekka this is quite familiar, but to millions of others it was new. There were still also people who thought that one can’t have fun in a classical music concert. The video extracted by BBC spread on the web like wildfire.

“Pekka is a natural line-crosser who is at home with several different music styles. Pekka is also a good example of how the audience can be made part of the performance in a more powerful way. It is great that the video was noticed so widely”, says Vänskä.

Osmo Vänskä is a serious conductor, but he has made his own orchestral arrangement of *Säkkijärven polkka* [Polka of Säkkijärvi – a traditional Finnish tune] and conducted it all around the world. He has also conducted music by the bands Abba and Beatles in orchestral concerts, agreed to the manufacturing of Vänskä bobble head dolls in Minneapolis, and let it loose with his clarinet in a Havananan night club last May. “The concerts in Havana were an unbelievable
experience, as were the side-by-side rehearsals with Havanan music students”, tells Vänskä. HS was there when the Minnesota Orchestra was practicing with the students in such a way that there was a student and a professional musician playing the same part at each stand.

Next Monday, Minnesota Orchestra will have a same kind of rehearsal with youth orchestra Vivo.

“It is excellent master-apprentice teaching”, Vänskä says. “We will remain in Lahti on Monday precisely for the reason that we help youth orchestra Vivo practice Antonín Dvořák’s Ninth Symphony "From the New World".

All of this provides good variation to the diligent rebuilding, which has followed the 16-month-long lock-out. The lock-out took place in 2012-2014, when the CEO at the time tried to cut musicians’ salaries by up to a third after the contract had ended. During the long lock-out some top musicians decided to retire, and others changed orchestras. Thus there are now many new string players in the orchestra engaged on one-year probation. “The musicians take part in artistic planning and are taking responsibility of their own future in a completely new way. After the lock-out the orchestra welded together in an extremely motivated way. I’d say that it plays better than it has ever played during my tenure.”

Vänskä himself feels like he has changed. “At least I wish that the sense of making things happen and the possibilities of the music to breathe have grown in just the past few years. It is not only book-wisdom, but also the emotional happening of music that comes out of the scores.” Vänskä speaks beautifully about “musical breathing”. “We all breathe in different ways when emotional states change. Expanding one’s musical breathing habits can also bring more color to performances.”

The next challenge will be to record all of Gustav Mahler’s symphonies with the Minnesota Orchestra. On Vänskä’s calendar there is also a concert series of all of Sibelius symphonies with the London Philharmonic.

The next concerts in Finland will also include new music. In December, he will conduct the premiere of Eero Hämeenniemi’s new work and a selection of Sibelius’ music for the play Tempest with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the spring it is first Lahti Symphony in February and then Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in April, when the program will include for example Kalevi Aho’s concerto for percussionist Colin Currie and orchestra. “And in summer 2017 at Naantali Music Festival, I will conduct the premiere of Olli Kortekangas’ oratory with Lahti Symphony”, tells Vänskä.

Minnesota Orchestra, conductor Osmo Vänskä and violinist Pekka Kuusisto at Lahti Sibelius Hall on Sunday August 21 at 4 pm. – Stucky, Prokofiev, Beethoven.

(Radio recording later the same evening on Yle Radio 1 at 7:03 pm.)
Side-by-side rehearsal of Minnesota Orchestra and youth orchestra Vivo, open to public, at Sibelius Hall on Monday 11 am – 1 pm.

FACTS
Osmo Vänskä and the Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä began as the Music Director of the Minnesota Orchestra in 2003. During his tenure, he has recorded for example all symphonies of Beethoven and Sibelius and he has received a Grammy.

In 2013, Vänskä resigned from his post when a racking and tearing job action was not settled within a timeframe he had set. The lock-out lasted 16 months and ended in February 2014.

After the lock-out, the CEO who had been pushing for fierce pay cuts had to leave. Vänskä, who had been sympathetic towards the musicians, returned to his post as the Music Director.

In May 2015, the Minnesota Orchestra gave a concert in Cuba as the first US orchestra in this century as part of the détente between the two countries.

The European tour that starts now and is supported by private donations, will also take the Minnesota Orchestra to Edinburgh, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen.