Minnesota Orchestra’s Exciting Return to Lahti
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By Harri Kuusisaari

Photo caption: According to Osmo Vänskä all Minnesota Orchestra musicians are dedicated from the bottom of their souls to building a common future.

On August 21st, Osmo Vänskä brings an excited Minnesota Orchestra to Lahti’s Sibelius Hall. The orchestra is better than ever, Vänskä guarantees.

In addition to Lahti, Minnesota Orchestra’s European tour includes performances at Edinburgh International Festival, Amsterdam Concertgebouw, and Copenhagen Tivoli. This tour is special in the sense that it is the first one after the orchestra’s dramatic 16-month-long lock-out ended. The most recent previous tour was in 2010.

The lock-out had several phases, which included Osmo Vänskä’s resignation from the Music Director’s post as a protest against the employer’s actions. Eventually Vänskä won the power struggle, the CEO was replaced, lock-out finished and Vänskä returned as the Music Director.

The orchestra could not simply continue as before since several musicians had left for other orchestras and it required work to reach the earlier level. Osmo Vänskä is convincing when he says that rebuilding was fast because the musicians were highly motivated.

“The European tour is an important opportunity for proving ourselves: we have to demonstrate that we play better than ever. Every musician is completely dedicated to giving their best,” Vänskä says. He has extended his own contract until August 2019.

What, then, was the mood like among the musicians during the lock-out?

“This may seem surprising but the orchestra really welded tightly together then. The musicians organized several sold-out concerts [under the name Musicians of Minnesota Orchestra]. From the beginning of the conflict the audience was on the musicians’ side and showed its opinion very clearly whenever possible, for example by ten-minute applause and cheering sessions before concerts began,” Vänskä describes.

Soon Vänskä’s assurances can be confirmed by listening to a new CD, as BIS releases the last part of Minnesota Orchestra’s recordings of Sibelius’ symphonies. Third, sixth, and seventh symphonies were recorded in nine sessions, which were preceded by live concerts in Minnesota.

“Next we will record Mahler’s all symphonies for BIS, two symphonies per year. There are also other international tours in the works,” Vänskä says.
It was 2004 when the orchestra and Vänskä visited Lahti’s Sibelius Hall the last time. Return to Lahti is personally important to the conductor – he has strong emotional ties to the city after having worked as the principal conductor of Lahti Symphony for 20 years.

The soloist in the concert will be Pekka Kuusisto, who will perform Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto. The orchestra will also play Steven Stucky’s Rhapsodies and Beethoven’s Third Symphony.

“The day after the concert we will have a side-by-side rehearsal with youth orchestra Vivo, in which we will play Dvorak’s “From the New World” symphony. At every stand there will be a musician from both Vivo and Minnesota Orchestra. I will be conducting. It is a regular rehearsal, where musicians from each orchestra will take turns playing solos. The very good principle of interaction between the master and an apprentice is put to practice,” Vänskä describes.

Minnesota Orchestra has had side-by-side rehearsals at home for years, and last year it did the same with a Cuban youth orchestra while visiting Cuba. The orchestra had a concert in Havana. It was the first time an American orchestra visited Cuba since Presidents Obama and Castro began normalizing relations between the two countries.