

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Elina Vähälä, violin

Friday, September 22, 2017, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall
Saturday, September 23, 2017, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Kalevi Aho	<i>Minea</i> : Concertante Music for Orchestra	ca. 18'
Jaakko Kuusisto	Violin Concerto, Opus 28 Moderato Lento Molto allegro [There is no pause before the second movement.] <i>Elina Vähälä, violin</i>	ca. 30'
	I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Jean Sibelius	Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 43 Allegretto Andante, ma rubato Vivacissimo Finale: Allegro moderato	ca. 44'

NightCap

FinnFest Finale NightCap: Vänskä Plays Sibelius

Post-concert performance by Osmo Vänskä, Elina Vähälä and Minnesota Orchestra musicians, featuring Sibelius' Overture in F minor for Brass Septet, and Sibelius' *En Saga*, arranged by Jaakko Kuusisto for Clarinet, Bassoon, Horn, and String Quintet
Saturday, September 23, 10:30 pm; separate ticket required

thank you

We recognize the generous support of these performances by **Finlandia Foundation National**, which welcomes you to tonight's concert in a message on page 57.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of **Classical Minnesota Public Radio**, including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.





Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 8.



Elina Vähälä, violin

Violinist Elina Vähälä, who was born in the U.S. and raised in Finland, made her orchestral debut with the Lahti Symphony at age 12 and was later chosen by Osmo Vänskä as that orchestra's "Young Master Soloist." Since then, her career has continued to expand on the international stage, highlighted by appearances with the Helsinki Philharmonic, Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Sinfonia Lahti, Turku Philharmonic, Oregon Symphony, Nashville Symphony and Minnesota Orchestra, with which she debuted a decade ago at the 2007 Sommerfest. In addition, she has toured throughout the U.K., Finland, Germany, China, Korea and South America. In 2008 she was chosen to perform at the Nobel Peace Prize Ceremony in Oslo, Norway,

which was televised to a worldwide audience. With funding from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, she launched the Violin Academy, a masterclass-based educational project for selected, highly talented young Finnish violinists. She is also a professor at the University of Music in Karlsruhe, Germany.
More: dispeker.com, elinavahala.com.

This week's performances are presented in conjunction with FinnFest USA 2017, an annual Finnish-American heritage festival taking place in Minneapolis from September 21 to 24. This year's FinnFest USA commemorates Finland's 100 years as a nation state and includes seminars, forums, performances and other events taking place in and around Orchestra Hall and other area venues. The Orchestra Hall lobby and adjoining Peavey Plaza are home to a tori community marketplace featuring vendors, artists and community groups. The Orchestra is very pleased to partner with FinnFest USA and K. Marianne Wargelin, the Honorary Consul for Finland in the Twin Cities and the President of FinnFest USA. More information and a schedule of events are available at finnfest.us.

one-minute notes

Aho: *Minea*

In this concert opener, commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra and premiered in 2009, each instrument is given a chance to shine as volume and tempo increase throughout. Adding flavor are percussion instruments and rhythms from non-Western cultures.

Kuusisto: *Violin Concerto*

Virtuoso violinist Jaakko Kuusisto composed this Violin Concerto for his friend, and tonight's soloist, Elina Vähälä. It is a dazzling journey of athleticism and lyricism, inspired by Vähälä's personality and brilliant musical talents.

Sibelius: *Symphony No. 2*

From an assortment of seemingly disjointed elements, Sibelius creates an imposing mosaic in his Second Symphony. One fascinating feature of the *Finale*: a wistful melody played over running eighth-notes, written in memory of the composer's sister-in-law.



Kalevi Aho

Born: March 9, 1949,
Forssa, Finland; now living in
Helsinki, Finland

Minea: Concertante Music for Orchestra

Premiered: November 5, 2009

Kalevi Aho and Osmo Vänskä first met in 1989, when Vänskä conducted two of Aho's works in a recording with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra in their native Finland. Since then, Vänskä has led premieres of some two dozen compositions by Aho, and has played an active role in commissioning many of them. He has earned a reputation as an authoritative interpreter of Aho's music, and has led six of Aho's works at Orchestra Hall since becoming the Minnesota Orchestra's music director in 2003.

Widely regarded as Finland's most distinguished symphonist since Sibelius, Aho studied with Einojuhani Rautavaara at the Sibelius Academy. He has become a major figure in European musical circles and has worked as a freelance composer since 1994.

made for Minnesota

Minea marked a bit of a departure for Aho, who is best known for multi-movement, large scale works. "It was Osmo's idea that I compose a shorter piece for the Minnesota Orchestra," Aho recalled at the time of the premiere here in 2009. "We discussed the prospect in 2005 when the orchestra played my Seventh Symphony. Osmo's proposal was a piece about 16 to 20 minutes, for a large orchestra, about 100 musicians. He wanted every musician of the Minnesota Orchestra to have an opportunity to shine."

That last specification yielded the subtitle, Concertante Music. "This piece really highlights the virtuosity of the Minnesota Orchestra," says Aho. "It also has some major solos for individual players, for example a very demanding contrabassoon solo toward the middle of the piece." As for the title: *Minea* is a play on Minneapolis. "When I finished composing, the work had no name. I began to twist the city name to find a title. I wondered about *Minnea*, then took away one 'n' and got *Minea*."

The form was left to Aho's discretion. He chose a free structure in several sections with a forward trajectory of tempi and volume. *Minea* opens *Tranquillo*, then steadily accelerates to *Allegro*, *Furioso*, and finally *Presto*. "The idea is simply that the music becomes faster and faster toward the end," he explains. "It is like a single, huge *accelerando* and *crescendo*."

unusual percussion: window to world music

Aho has long had an interest in non-Western music. *Minea* is one of several works in which he has expanded his musical vocabulary. "I have sought a new, fresh relation to tonality by using scales from other musical cultures," he explains. "I find rhythm in Western music less interesting than in African, Arabian, or Indian music. In *Minea*, I have tried to enrich the rhythmic element by using ethnic percussion and by adopting metric influences and patterns from other musical cultures."

Minea's score specifies a large percussion battery that requires four players. The most unusual instrument Aho includes is *darabukka*, a goblet-shaped drum prominent in North African and Middle-Eastern music. "I really like the sound of a good *darabukka*," declares Aho. A typical phenomenon in Arabian music is rhythmical patterns that repeat through the whole piece. Those patterns can be long and complicated. "*Minea* also has complex rhythmic patterns, which are repeated dozens of times before they change," he continues.

"*Minea's* form is also connected to classical Northern Indian music, which generally begins with a slow section lacking a clear pulse. Eventually a pulse is established, normally with a *tabla* player drumming. The tempo becomes faster and faster. At the end, the virtuosity and speed of the music increase to a maximum."

Aho compares the *Tranquillo* section that opens *Minea* to the opening of an Indian *raga*, which designates a particular scale pattern, patterns of rising and falling pitches, and mood. The ensuing *Allegro*, *Furioso*, and *Presto* sections correspond to the more rhythmic sections of an Indian composition; however, he has added inflections from Arabian music. "And at the beginning," he notes, "you might also hear a little Japanese flavor."

Instrumentation: 3 flutes, piccolo, 3 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 6 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, tenor drum, bass drum, large suspended cymbal, 2 small suspended cymbals, 2 bongos, chains, 2 congas, *darabukka*, *tamtam*, 4 tom-toms, *glockenspiel*, *vibraphone*, chimes, harp, piano and strings





Jaakko Kuusisto

Born: January 17, 1974,
in Helsinki, Finland;
now living there

Violin Concerto, Opus 28

Premiered: April 12, 2012

Collaborative partnerships between composers and violinists have yielded some of the bedrock works in the orchestral literature. Mendelssohn wrote his E-minor Concerto for Ferdinand David, concertmaster of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, and Brahms relied substantially on input from his friend Joseph Joachim while composing his Violin Concerto. In the 20th century, Zoltán Székeley urged Bartók to write a concerto for him; Shostakovich drew inspiration from his friend David Oistrakh. Further examples are plentiful.

from one violinist to another

A virtuoso violinist himself, contemporary Finnish composer Jaakko Kuusisto has performed many of the great concertos in the repertoire, and he had contemplated writing his own violin concerto since the turn of the millennium. The opportunity arose when Elina Vähälä suggested that he compose a concerto for her. The two had collaborated on several projects, so Kuusisto was well acquainted with her playing and her personality.

The project fell into place with funding from the Arts Council of Finland and the Finnish Composers' Copyright Bureau TEOSTO, which enabled Vähälä to formally commission the piece. She was the soloist at the premiere on April 12, 2012, with Kuusisto conducting the Lahti Symphony Orchestra. The same forces have recorded the concerto for BIS Records, and Vähälä continues to champion it as a touring soloist.

Although this weekend marks the first time that the Minnesota Orchestra has performed Kuusisto's music on its classical subscription series, he is no stranger here. In 2004 he was the soloist in performances of Rautavaara's Violin Concerto. He has also arranged several medleys of music by ABBA, Queen and the Beatles for concerts with the Orchestra and Finnish vocal ensemble Rajaton. Audiences hungry for even more can hear Kuusisto's octet arrangement of Sibelius' tone poem *En Saga* in a "NightCap" concert following the full-Orchestra concert on Saturday, September 23. (A separate ticket is required.)

the music: a brilliant 21st-century concerto

For Vähälä, Kuusisto composed a major work by any measure. Its

structure is fairly traditional: three movements, with the first movement in sonata-allegro form, followed by a more leisurely and solemn slow movement and an energetic finale; however, the placement of the solo cadenza at the concerto's opening departs from convention.

moderato. The extended cadenza is a study in drama, unfolding slowly and deliberately with tonally ambiguous intervals and abundant double stops, in which two notes are played simultaneously. Kuusisto introduces rapid scalar runs and aggressive dissonance, while never fully abandoning tonal moorings. Triplet figuration accelerates the pace, leading to the orchestra's explosive entry about three minutes into the first movement.

A metamorphosis occurs as the soloist distills the cadenza to its essence: we hear the theme in its pure form. Radiant and unabashedly romantic, the theme soars above Kuusisto's lush harmonies and colorful orchestration. When the low brasses declaim it, the soloist embroiders with a sweetness and delicacy that are at once reminiscent of Sibelius and completely Kuusisto's own. Dualities between drama and lyricism, and between diatonicism and edgier sonorities, define the balance of the first movement. Melodic and harmonic ideas from the cadenza resurface (including some whole tone scales), transformed and decorated in rhapsodic fashion. Eventually they coalesce in a coda that drives to a thrilling close.

lento. A sustained note in the horns effects the transition to the slow movement. An air of hushed mystery prevails, with cameos for harp and woodwinds in dialogue with the violin, while muted *tremolandi* strings shimmer in the background. A more agitated middle section interrupts, leading to another violin outburst in double stops. After building to an explosive climax for full orchestra, calm and mystery return.

molto allegro. Kuusisto's finale storms out of the gate with crackling wood blocks beating time. Quasi-minimalist syncopated figures for winds dance around the insistent pulse. Both are introductory to the violin's whirlwind *perpetuum mobile* entrance. The soloist sustains that energy level for the duration of the movement, hurtling with dizzying speed in tandem with the motoric orchestra. It is a thrilling ride, replete with moments to catch our breath and recall the ravishing lyricism of the first movement. Kuusisto is a masterful orchestrator who is completely at home writing for large ensemble without eclipsing the violin. His woodwind writing throughout the concerto is extraordinary. Ultimately, of course, violin is at the center. One has the feeling that he has composed a musical portrait of Vähälä. Through his music, we know this remarkable woman. In turn, her performance illuminates a brilliant 21st-century concerto.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, wood blocks, glockenspiel, crotales, vibraphone, harp and strings



Jean Sibelius

Born: December 8, 1865,
Tavastehus, Finland
Died: September 20, 1957,
Järvenpää, Finland

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Opus 43

Premiered: March 8, 1902

"Sibelius is an aggravatingly difficult person to catalogue," music critic Lawrence Abbott once said. Finland's most celebrated composer has been variously described as late Romantic, expressionist, nationalist, spiritual mythologist and futurist. Partly because he enjoyed such a long life and fruitful career (though he did not compose any major works in the last third of his life), his style evolved and altered, lending some credence to all the aforementioned categories. At the same time, certain common themes—Finnish legend, national pride—recurred throughout his career.

Sibelius' more substantial forms descend from the Classic-Romantic symphonic structures of Tchaikovsky; however, his harmonic language is less chromatic. Sibelius relies on triads and often uses parallel thirds to state his melodies. He also draws on modal scales common to Finnish folk songs. Always, he favors simpler means to deliver his ideas.

the music: a brief sub-arctic summer

Composed in 1901 and 1902, the Second Symphony has become Sibelius' most popular symphony, perhaps because of its frankly nationalistic stance. Despite its origins in Finland's harsh Nordic climate, this symphony pulses with the warmth of the brief sub-arctic summer. The symphony's popularity, however, does not hinge solely on its expansive mood. Pastoral elements alternate with intense drama, making for a fully satisfying musical experience. Simon Parmet, a 20th-century Finnish conductor, composer and writer, referred to Sibelius in this work as being "in one of those rare moods in which he is in complete harmony with the external world."

allegretto. In its day, the symphony startled listeners because of its first movement's unconventional form. One doesn't hear themes so much as musical gestures: short motives from which larger thematic "paragraphs" evolve. Sibelius detaches these succinct motives at the beginning, then forges them together in his development. At the conclusion of the movement, he breaks the melodic components into fragments again. The entire process is almost the inverse of the conventional approach to musical logic as codified in sonata form, wherein one expects exposition of

thematic ideas that are fragmented and developed in a middle section, then unified at the close.

andante, ma rubato. Sibelius referred to his second movement as "a spiritualized development." Many of its ideas originated in sketches for a symphonic poem about Don Juan as he confronts Death. An ominous timpani roll and pizzicato cellos and basses open the movement in D minor. Bassoons deliver the first theme, their low register underscoring the dark mood. An agitated passage for full orchestra leads to the strings' angelic second theme, in a remarkable modulation to the distant key of F-sharp major. In Sibelius's sketches, this theme is marked "Christus": the prospect of salvation contrasting with the fate of the unrepentant libertine Don Juan. As in the legend, Death prevails, with a return of the bassoon melody.

vivacissimo. The gruff scherzo demands virtuoso playing from the entire orchestra. Whirlwind string figures skitter about in all registers, punctuated by woodwinds in snippets of themes. The trio section slows down the pace, presenting more song-like themes and shifting the melodic emphasis to woodwinds.

finale: allegro moderato. Sibelius' transition from the third movement to the finale is one of the symphony's master strokes. He fuses them together by repeating the trio section and letting it unfold gradually into his finale. The transition—possibly modeled on Beethoven's similar ploy in the Fifth Symphony—is ingenious, organic, and thoroughly convincing, arriving at the majestic finale theme with marvelous assurance.

Biographer Burnett James has written that the symphony's finale "is a fine paean of praise and strength, a sturdy affirmation of life and vitality...The force of nature is given full rein. The winds howl and roar; the tuba emits prodigies of elemental energy; strings scurry and swirl; and once again the great ostinato pedal points in the orchestra hold the foundations firm."

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani and strings

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coda

The Minnesota Orchestra first performed **Sibelius' Symphony No. 2** on November 8, 1912, at the Minneapolis Auditorium, with founding Music Director Emil Oberhoffer conducting. The Orchestra's 2011 recording of Sibelius' Second and Fifth Symphonies, made under Music Director Osmo Vänskä's direction, was nominated for the 2012 Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance. Vänskä has conducted 234 performances of Sibelius' music with the Orchestra—more than any previous music director.

