

nov 12, 13

Mendelssohn's *Reformation* Symphony

Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Robert Cohen, cello

Thursday, November 12, 2009, 11 am | Orchestra Hall

Friday, November 13, 2009, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Jean Sibelius | *Pelleas and Melisande, Opus 46* | ca. 26'

At the Castle Gate
Melisande
At the Seashore
By a Spring in the Park
The Three Blind Sisters
Pastorale
Melisande at the Spinning Wheel
Entr'acte
The Death of Melisande

Sally Beamish | Cello Concerto No. 2, *The Song Gatherer** | ca. 25'

Largo
Adagio
Allegretto
Robert Cohen, cello

I N T E R M I S S I O N | ca. 20'

Felix Mendelssohn | Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Opus 107, *Reformation* | ca. 33'

Andante – Allegro con fuoco
Allegro vivace
Andante
Chorale: Andante con moto – Allegro vivace

* World premiere, co-commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra and the Hallé Orchestra.

Violinist Nathan Cole serves as guest concertmaster for these performances.

Book Signing: After the Thursday morning concert, Osmo Vänskä will sign copies of the biography *Osmo Vänskä: Orchestra Builder*, by Michael Anthony.

thank you

With these concerts, we recognize the support of **The Medtronic Foundation**.

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music up close

Meet a Musician

Gina DiBello, principal second violin
11/12 at 10:30 am
11/13 at 7 pm
Orchestra Hall Auditorium

Music in the Lobby

Lake String Quartet
11/12, pre-concert



Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 14.



Robert Cohen, cello

Robert Cohen has an international career as soloist, conductor, chamber musician and teacher. These concerts mark the 15th anniversary of his 1994 debut with the Minnesota Orchestra, when he performed the Schumann Cello Concerto under the baton of Stanislaw Skrowaczewski.

Contemporary music: Among the composers who have written concertos for Cohen are Benjamin Ellin, Jorge Bosso and Kimmo Hakola; he premiered Sally Beamish's First Cello Concerto in 1997.

New projects: In 2009 he launched Robert Cohen's Cello Clinic, a program devoted to diagnosing and resolving cellists' physical and performing issues. He is the curator of a soon-to-debut classical music channel on the Internet, and he is beginning a series of podcasts.

Discography: Cohen has recorded works ranging from Bach cello suites to concertos of Elgar, Tchaikovsky, Dvořák, Beamish and HK Gruber.

Educator: He is a professor at both the Royal Academy of Music and the Conservatory of Italian Switzerland.

More: robertcohen.info.

one-minute notes

Sibelius: *Pelleas and Melisande*

Sibelius tells a tale of tragic lovers in nine short movements, with a plaintive English horn as the heroine's voice. The work ranges in tone from solemn to playful, building to an anguished climax that subsides into a dark mist.

Beamish: *Cello Concerto No. 2, The Song Gatherer*

We are treated to a world premiere that draws on folk tunes from several continents, with the cello as protagonist in a journey of lament, meditation and joyful reflection. Highlights include a haunting opening and the finale, a raucous dance.

Mendelssohn: *Symphony No. 5, Reformation*

Devotion and strength are the building blocks of this symphony, composed to mark an anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. A reflective opening ultimately leads to a grandiose finale built on Luther's hymn *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. Along the way we hear a lighthearted scherzo and an eloquent slow movement featuring solo violin.



Jean Sibelius

Born: December 8, 1865 Hämeenlinna (Tavastehus)
Died: September 20, 1957, Järvenpää

Pelleas and Melisande, Opus 46

maurice Maeterlinck’s finely-wrought Symbolist drama *Pelleas and Melisande*, set in the mists of time in mythical Allemonde, was given its premiere performance in Paris on May 17, 1893.

inspiration to many

In the audience that night was Claude Debussy, who almost immediately afterwards began work on an opera that would see its own premiere nine years later. Although he was the first to seize upon the musical possibilities of Maeterlinck’s play, his was not the first music inspired by the drama to be performed. In 1898, a production of the play was given in London, in English, with incidental music by Gabriel Fauré. In England, Cyril Scott and William Wallace wrote music based on the play, and in Vienna Arnold Schoenberg saw his long, sumptuously scored tone poem premiered in January of 1905.

The work we hear tonight dates from later that same year: a production of the drama (in Swedish) took place in Helsinki with incidental music from Sibelius, from which the

composer eventually assembled a suite of nine numbers.

There is a stern solemnity to the suite’s opening number, *At the Castle Gate*, which also introduces the whole play. The dark colors and weighty sonorities do indeed conjure into view a forbidding northern castle. Musically we are introduced to *Melisande* through a slow, melancholy waltz played by the English horn over a discreet accompaniment of muted strings, thus identifying her as a timid and frail creature. The darkly mysterious *At the Seashore* is a brief melodrama, in which a text is declaimed over the music. *By a Spring in the Park* is another waltz, faster than the first, with the melody principally in the violins.

The Three Blind Sisters is a song (the only one in the play) for Melisande, whose vocal line is given to instruments in the suite: a haunting introduction for English horn over a faint rumble of timpani, followed by a plaintive ballad “sung” by clarinets. Clarinets also take the lead in the lovely *Pastorale*, which develops into a miniature tone poem featuring woodwinds singly and in pairs. Of special note here are the quiet trills in the low register of the flute. *Melisande at the Spinning Wheel* is another descriptive piece with the expected whirring of the wheel portrayed in the violas. The *Entr’acte* brings a light and playful touch to this predominantly gloomy and mystical drama. *The Death of Melisande* begins quietly, rises to an anguished climax, then subsides into the dark mists.

Instrumentation:

flute doubling piccolo, oboe doubling English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, timpani, bass drum, triangle and strings



Sally Beamish

Born: August 26, 1956, London;
 now living in Callander, Perthshire, Scotland

Cello Concerto No. 2, *The Song Gatherer*

Sally Beamish began composing when she was four. “I used to draw pictures on the staves in my little manuscript book—flowers and people—and my mother would play the dots,” she recalls. From

at the same time...

In 1893, when Sibelius’ *Pelleas and Melisande* is first performed:

- The words to *America the Beautiful* are penned by Wellesley professor Katharine Lee Bates
- Norwegian artist Edvard Munch paints his best known work, *The Scream*
- New Orleans hosts the longest-ever boxing match—110 rounds in more than seven hours

Mendelssohn’s *Fifth Symphony* premieres in 1832, the year:

- Newspaper owner William Lloyd Garrison founds the New England Anti-Slavery Society
- John C. Calhoun becomes the first U.S. vice president to resign, leaving office after a series of disputes with President Andrew Jackson
- The last surviving signer of the Declaration of Independence, Charles Carroll of Maryland, dies at age 95

there her road to a career as a professional composer took a long detour. At nine she began to learn the violin, then switched to viola. Beamish studied at Royal Northern College, then with violist Bruno Giuranna in Germany. In 1982 she became a founding member of the Raphael Ensemble and gained additional experience as a member of the London Sinfonietta. The years 1989-1990 proved to be a turning point in her career—her viola was stolen, she moved from London to Scotland with her Scottish husband, and she reevaluated where her career was heading. The decision was not difficult: composition. In this respect, Beamish was in good company: among the famous composers who were accomplished violists before turning full-time to composition are Paganini, Dvořák, Respighi and Hindemith.

Beamish's first orchestral score appeared in 1992—a symphony commissioned by the Iceland Symphony Orchestra for its 50th anniversary. Then began a long series of concertos and concerted works that continues to this day: for oboe (*Tam Lin*), violin, viola (three), cello, trumpet, flute, saxophone, saxophone quartet, accordion and percussion. Beamish's first cello concerto caught the attention of Robert von Bahr, head of the Swedish label BIS, leading to a series of recordings on this label. (The sixth is due out next year.) From 1998 to 2002, Beamish enjoyed the unusual arrangement of being composer in residence with two orchestras simultaneously, the Swedish Chamber Orchestra and the Scottish Chamber Orchestra. For them she wrote four major compositions.

Beamish's career has obviously progressed far beyond drawing pictures on staves. Orchestras from Minneapolis to Melbourne play her music. She is now approached regularly by leading musicians and organizations for new works. Her *Knotgrass Elegy* was commissioned by the BBC Proms in 2001; the opera *Monster* (based on the life of Frankenstein's creator, Mary Shelley) was a commission from the Brighton Festival and Scottish Opera; Håken Hardenberger and the National Youth Orchestra of Scotland commissioned a trumpet concerto.

Qualities that infuse a number of Beamish's works include a sure feeling for instrumental colors, high-intensity writing and a strong sense of narrative or dialogue. The latter element is especially pronounced in works like *Tam Lin* (1993), based on a Scottish folk tale of damnation and redemption; her first viola concerto (1995), which portrays, without the use of words, the New Testament story of Peter's denial of Christ; and her first cello

concerto, *River* (1997), inspired by the eponymous poem of Ted Hughes. In a word, this music gets you involved.

birds over Poland, "soaring pure energy"

The Cello Concerto No. 2, subtitled *The Song Gatherer*, resulted from a dual commission from the Minnesota Orchestra and the Hallé Orchestra in England. Following the world premiere here in Minneapolis, Mark Elder will lead the United Kingdom premiere on December 2, 2010, in Manchester. Robert Cohen will be the soloist on both occasions. The cellist has remarked that "music is like a journey through purity, complexity, grief, elation, discovery, peace, beauty and enlightenment, reaching for ultimate freedom and strength," and compares the experience to "soaring pure energy." Beamish herself writes:

Approaching his 50th birthday, Robert asked me to write him a work that could reflect his personal journey, taking hints from his roots and reflecting on his view of life now at his "mid-way" point. This concerto uses ideas of traveling, following and gathering—the movement of peoples, the itinerant nature of Robert's life as a musician, constantly moving from one culture to another. I have used musical forms and devices that echo these ideas: the scale, the fugue and the canon. The cello takes us traveling: the music is often restless, always moving on, but settling also on extended lament, meditation, and joyful reflection.

Robert's "soaring pure energy" inspired me to look into the flights of birds. Poland is one of the main junctions where a number of bird migration routes meet, traveling from Europe to Siberia, Africa and Asia. I have used their songs to embellish the music. A Polish folksong about the white stork, a symbol of good fortune, begs the bird to stay rather than setting off for Africa. This is the only tune I have used in its entirety, at the end of the second movement.

The first movement takes as its starting point a Yiddish lullaby, *Raisins and Almonds*, by Goldfaden, particularly its haunting refrain, oscillating between two adjacent notes. The Concerto opens with an extended fugal introduction which builds through the strings, adding woodwind and brass, until the cello enters in clear space with an extended recitative, before the music launches into a restless toccata. Voice follows voice, building layers of canon. A more gentle central section surrounds the cello

with harp and cascading flutes and clarinets, and the high-pitched E-flat clarinet utters the haunting refrain of the lullaby, before the toccata returns.

The second movement weaves together tiny fragments of three folk songs: a Chassidic tune from Poland, a South African melody, *Sarie Marais*, which itself has its origins in Europe and has become a national song, and the Polish ‘white stork’ folk song. The cello mirrors the stuttering vocal articulations from Chassidic singing, and the sounds of migrating birds are heard—black kites, warblers, corncrakes and swallows, and the rattles and whispers of the white stork.

I remember playing quartets with Robert and his sister when he was a small boy, Robert stamping his feet, laughing and almost dancing as he played. This memory was the inspiration of the last movement, which begins with a raucous dance accompanied by drum. The dance draws the orchestra in, leading to a wild climax, out of which emerges the opening fugue from the first movement, this time leading to a high, tranquil plane, with jewel-like flashes on small bells.

Instrumentation:

solo cello with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bamboo chimes, crotales, suspended cymbals, snare drum, piccolo snare drum, glockenspiel, guiro, sandblocks, triangle, tubular bell in G-sharp, vibraphone, xylophone, harp and strings



Felix Mendelssohn

Born: February 3, 1809, Hamburg
Died: November 4, 1847, Leipzig

Symphony No. 5 in D minor, Opus 107, Reformation

mendelssohn composed his *Reformation* Symphony in late 1829 and early 1830. It was meant to form part of the celebration in honor of the 300th anniversary of the Augsburg Confession, a document outlining the tenets of the Protestant faith as professed by Martin Luther and serving

as the foundation of the Reformation (the Lutheran Church). Due to general political unrest, the premiere scheduled for 1830 was cancelled.

a premiere delayed

Two years later, when Mendelssohn was in Paris, a performance was planned for the concert series organized by Antoine Habeneck, but in rehearsal, the musicians complained that the symphony had too much *fugato*, too much counterpoint and too little melody—and Habeneck withdrew the symphony. It was finally performed in Berlin later that year, with the composer conducting, but Mendelssohn’s faith in the work had been shattered. He never performed it again, and never published it. Only in 1868, 21 years after Mendelssohn’s death, was the symphony finally published. The absurdly high opus number (Op. 107) was assigned by the publisher, as was the title. Mendelssohn himself had considered several titles for the symphony, including “Reformation,” “Confession,” and “Symphony for a Church Festivity.” The program for the premiere in Berlin called it “Symphony for the Commemoration of the Church Revolution.” As Mendelssohn never officially sanctioned any of these, we cannot know which, if any, he would have designated upon publication.

Then there is the further mystery as to why an apparently Jewish composer would concern himself with a Protestant theme. The story of the composer’s hyphenated surname, Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, answers this anomaly. His maternal uncle Jakob had converted to the Lutheran faith and had taken the name Bartholdy. He persuaded his brother-in-law (Felix’s father) Abraham to convert likewise, and the Mendelssohns in the family to which Felix was born affixed Bartholdy to their surname to distinguish themselves from other Mendelssohns who remained in the Jewish faith. Felix was therefore Jewish by bloodline, but baptized a Christian.

In 1829, the year in which the *Reformation* Symphony was conceived, an event of great musical importance served to reinforce Mendelssohn’s Lutheran involvement. This was the first performance in almost a century of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, which Mendelssohn led in Berlin. As Bach had incorporated much Lutheran material in this work, so too did Mendelssohn resolve to do the same in his *Reformation* Symphony.

the music

andante – allegro con fuoco. The symphony opens in a mood of quiet devotion with a four-note figure familiar

to listeners who know the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter* Symphony. But this figure was by no means the exclusive property of Mozart. It had been used by numerous composers before him, and in fact can be traced back to a Gregorian chant *Magnificat* motif, which means that its ultimate source lies in an ancient synagogal melody. The *Andante* introduction also includes another ecumenical reference, the so-called "Dresden Amen," first heard quietly and devoutly in the strings. This particular harmonization of the cadence was made by Johann Gottlieb Naumann in Dresden in the late 18th century for the Catholic church, but it was later adopted by the Protestants as well. Its most famous use in classical music is in Wagner's *Parsifal*, where in slightly different form it becomes the Grail motif.

The main section (*Allegro con fuoco*) of the first movement unfolds in standard sonata form, beginning with a severe and strongly rhythmic theme in D minor derived from the trumpet fanfares in the slow introduction. The second theme is graceful and lyrical, though still imbued with the rhythmic urgency found in the first theme. Extensive contrapuntal interplay characterizes the development section, which works out the material in Mendelssohn's typically well-crafted manner. The "Dresden Amen" makes another appearance as the bridge between development and recapitulation.

allegro vivace. The second movement is a scherzo in all but name, strongly reminiscent of the lighthearted fairy world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—all smiles and joy and laughter. The central Trio section features some particularly felicitous woodwind writing.

andante. The slow movement, in G minor, is often referred to as a "song without words," and indeed, it bears resemblance to an operatic aria, with the sweetly eloquent violin in the solo role most of the time. After an impassioned climax, the music comes to rest on a sustained G in the low strings.

chorale: andante con moto – allegro vivace. A ray of light beams through the somber mood as a flute (an instrument Luther himself played), unaccompanied and unharmonized, announces the theme of Luther's famous hymn *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God), which serves as the transition to the final movement. This hymn holds special meaning for Lutherans, and it is hardly surprising to find it turn up as the basis of one of Bach's best-known cantatas (No. 80).

Additional wind instruments and strings gradually join the flute to create a richly harmonized chorale from the hymn tune. For this passage Mendelssohn included a serpent, a low-pitched wind instrument whose name derives from its shape, but which has long since fallen into disuse. Its part is usually taken today by a contrabassoon or tuba. The main portion of the movement commences with a sturdy, rising arpeggiated theme in the violins, which is followed in turn by several others, all of which are worked into a masterful contrapuntal display interwoven with statements of Luther's hymn. The movement's festive splendor is capped by a final broad proclamation of the chorale decked out in all its glory by the full orchestra.

Instrumentation:

2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program notes by Robert Markow.

“**Martin Luther** was not only a great lover of music, a skillful amateur, to some extent even a composer, but he knew perfectly well what powerful aid music could bring to the cause of the new Protestant movement....One of Luther's immortal accomplishments is the Protestant chorale, the new German spiritual folk song....The most famous chorale attributed to him is *Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott!*” It was written in 1528, when pestilence, at that time a frequent and dreadful guest in Europe, was approaching once more, and to a certain extent it is a poetic paraphrase of the Forty-Sixth Psalm. But what a power of language, what a strong manly soul in these verses, what a consoling confidence in the help of God, what a courageous militant spirit against the evil in the world! ”

—Hugo Leichtentritt in his book *Music, History and Ideas*, 1939