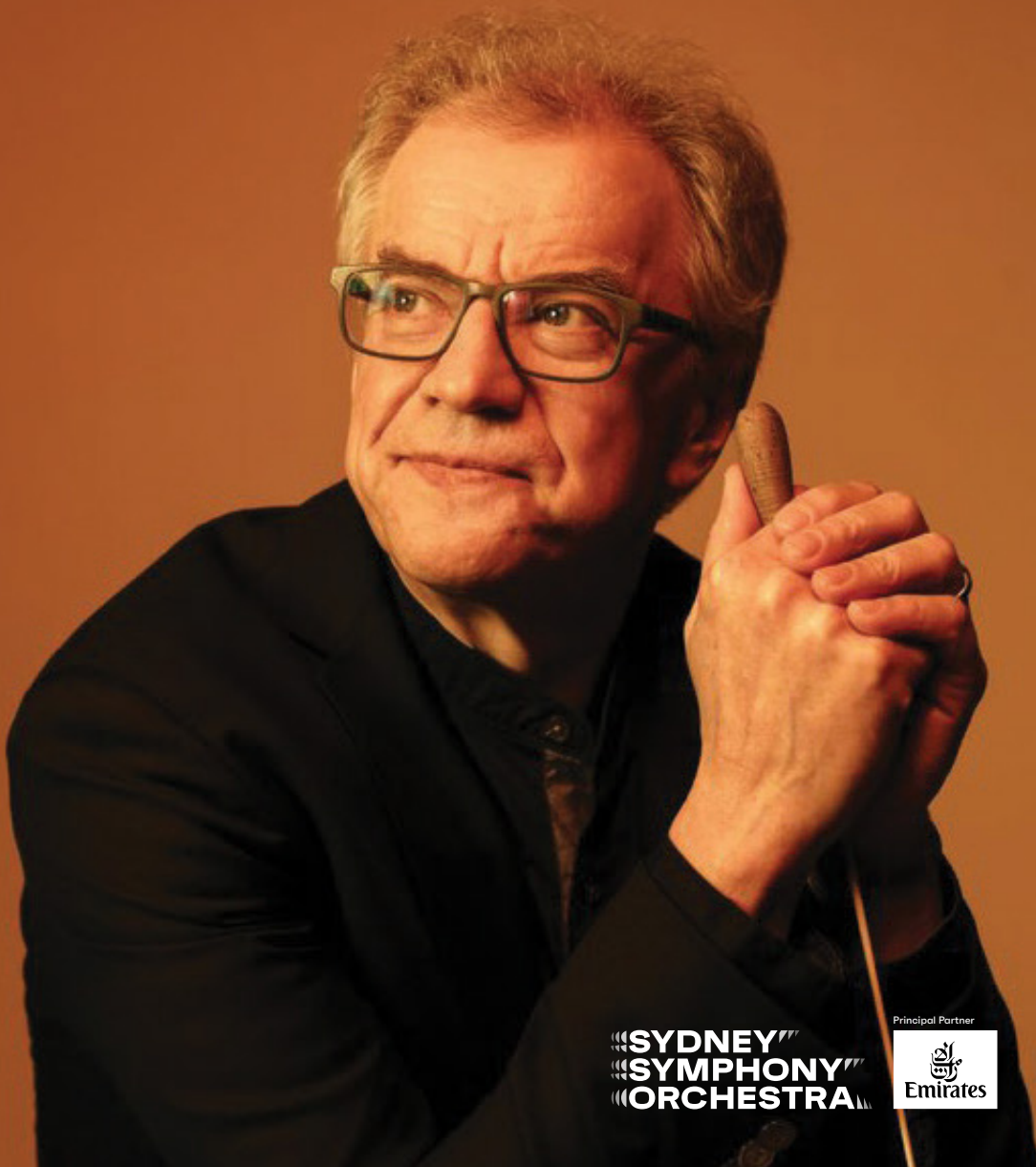


24, 26 & 27 April 2024

OSMO VÄNSKÄ

CONDUCTS THE MUSIC OF SIBELIUS



«SYDNEY»
«SYMPHONY»
«ORCHESTRA»

Principal Partner



SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

PATRON Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world's finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world's great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra's first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

FIRST VIOLINS

Andrew Haveron

Concertmaster

Harry Bennetts

Associate Concertmaster

Alexandra Osborne

Associate Concertmaster

Lerida Delbridge

Assistant Concertmaster

Fiona Ziegler

Assistant Concertmaster

Jennifer Booth

Sophie Cole

Sercan Danis

Claire Herrick

Georges Lentz

Emily Long

Alexandra Mitchell

Alexander Norton

Léone Ziegler

Robert Smith*

Tamara Elias*

SECOND VIOLINS

Marina Marsden

Principal

Emma Jezek

Acting Associate Principal

Alice Bartsch

Victoria Bihun

Emma Hayes

Shuti Huang

Monique Irik

Wendy Kong

Benjamin Li

Nicole Masters

Maja Verunica

Marcus Michelsen°

Emily Qin°

Riikka Sintonen°

VIOLAS

Tobias Breider

Principal

Carrie Dennis

Principal

Anne-Louise

Comerford

Associate Principal

Justin Williams

Assistant Principal

Sandro Costantino

Rosemary Curtin

Stuart Johnson

Justine Marsden

Felicity Tsai

Leonid Volovelsky

Stephen Wright°

Harry Swainston*

Thomas Chawner*

CELLOS

Catherine Hewgill

Principal

Simon Cobcroft

Associate Principal

Leah Lynn

Assistant Principal

Kristy Conrau

Fenella Gill

Elizabeth Neville

Adrian Wallis

Joseph Kelly†

Paul Ghica*

Eve Silver*

DOUBLE BASSES

Kees Boersma

Principal

Alex Henery

Principal

David Campbell

Dylan Holly

Steven Larson

Richard Lynn

Jaan Pallandi

Benjamin Ward

FLUTES

Joshua Batty

Principal

Laura Cliff†

Rosamund Plummer*

Guest Principal Piccolo

OBOES

Shefali Pryor

Acting Principal

Callum Hogan

Alexandre Oguey

Principal Cor Anglais

CLARINETS

Jonathan Cohen*

Guest Principal

Christopher Tingay

Alexander Morris

Principal Bass Clarinet

BASSOONS

Matthew Wilkie

Principal Emeritus

Fiona McNamara

Noriko Shimada

Principal Contrabassoon

HORNS

Nicolas Fleury*

Guest Principal

Euan Harvey

Acting Principal

Marnie Sebire

Rachel Silver

Ian Wildsmith*

TRUMPETS

David Elton

Principal

Brent Grapes

Associate Principal

Cécile Glémot

Joel Walmsley†

TROMBONES

Scott Kinnmont

Acting Principal

Nick Byrne

Brett Page*

TUBA

Edwin Diefes*

Guest Principal

TIMPANI

Antoine Siguré

Principal

Mark Robinson

Associate Principal Timpani/

Section Percussion

PERCUSSION

Rebecca Lagos

Principal

Timothy Constable

HARP

Natalie Wong°

Acting Principal Harp

Julie Kim*

Bold Principal

* Guest Musician

° Contract Musician

† Sydney Symphony Fellow

2024 CONCERT SEASON

EMIRATES MASTERS SERIES

Wednesday 24 April, 8pm

Friday 26 April, 8pm

Saturday 27 April, 8pm

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

OSMO VÄNSKÄ CONDUCTS THE MUSIC OF SIBELIUS COLOURFUL MYTHS AND LEGENDS

OSMO VÄNSKÄ conductor

HELENA JUNTUNEN soprano

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)

Pohjola's Daughter, Op.49 (1906)

Höstkväll (Autumn Night), Op.38 No.1 (1903)

Hertig Magnus (Count Magnus), Op.57 No.6 (1909)

Våren flyktar hastigt (Spring is Flying), Op.13 No.4 (1891)

The Bard, Op.64 (1913)

Luonnotar, Op.70 (1913)

INTERVAL

Lemminkäinen Suite (*Four Legends from the Kalevala*),
Op.22 (1893–95)

i. *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari*

ii. *The Swan of Tuonela*

iii. *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela*

iv. *Lemminkäinen's Return*

Pre-concert talk

By Phillip Sametz in the
Northern Foyer at 7.15pm

Estimated durations

Pohjola – 17 minutes

Höstkväll – 5 minutes

Hertig Magnus – 4 minutes

Våren – 2 minutes

The Bard – 6 minutes

Luonnotar – 10 minutes

Interval – 20 minutes

Lemminkäinen – 48 minutes

The concert will run for
approximately two hours

Cover image

Osmo Vänskä
Photo by Nate Ryan

Principal Partner



WELCOME

Welcome to **Osmo Vänskä conducts the music of Sibelius.**

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra have enjoyed one of the longest-standing and most significant relationships in Australia's performing arts, one of which we remain extremely proud.

Our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is a cornerstone of our ongoing support of music and arts around the world and reflects our long-standing commitment to Australia.

We're passionate about growing music, arts, and culture to enrich the lives of the communities we serve and connecting the finest talents with audiences globally. In this concert, we expand that commitment to include a partnership between artists of international renown based in Australia and Finland, centred on the music of Sibelius.

Finnish conductor Osmo Vänskä is considered one of the very finest exponents of the work of his countryman Sibelius. For this concert, Vänskä has chosen pieces that bring to life Finnish myths and legends, such as the heroic *Lemminkäinen Suite* featuring *The Swan of Tuonela*.

Completing the Finnish connection between composer, conductor and soloist, the Orchestra welcomes acclaimed Finnish soprano Helena Juntunen for a selection of five songs inspired by Finnish folklore. Finnish mythology is deeply connected to the natural world and an oral tradition of mythical poem-singing, and the music you will hear is a splendid journey into a world of snow, forests, lakes, mountains and tales of strange metamorphosis.

Over the course of the more than 20-year partnership between Emirates and the Orchestra, our common goal has been to bring wonderful journeys to life – taking people to places far beyond the ordinary, in both the physical and imaginary worlds.

We are delighted by our continuing partnership, and we do hope you enjoy this fascinating and powerful concert.



Barry Brown
Divisional Vice President for Australasia
Emirates



ABOUT THE ARTISTS

HELENA JUNTUNEN soprano

Helena Juntunen is one of Finland's most dazzling sopranos, leading both a national and international career. Her beautiful soprano voice enraptures audiences with its freshness, and her phrasing is praised for its expressive and natural quality.

Helena's career in Finland was established through winning many competitions. She started her vocal studies at the age of 15 at the Oulu Conservatoire with Airi Tokola and graduated as a Master of Music from the Sibelius Academy, where her teacher was Anita Välikki.

Juntunen has been a regular performer at the Finnish National Opera since 1999. But it was with the role of Marguerite in Gounod's *Faust* at the Savonlinna Opera Festival in 2002 where she had her professional breakthrough, and her US debut followed with Connecticut Opera in the 2003-2004 season in the same role. Other debuts in this period include *Madame Cortese* in Rossini's *Il viaggio a Reims* in Genova, *Zdenka* in Strauss' *Arabella* in Antwerp, and *Pamina* in *The Magic Flute* at the State Opera Dresden. Helena also gave her debut concert at New York's Carnegie Hall in October 2003, followed by her first appearance in Tokyo.

After adding roles like Liu (*Turandot*) and Sophie (*Rosenkavalier*) to her repertoire, she made a brilliant debut with the Vienna Festival as *Pamina*, a role which she also sang in Brussels, Nancy, Minnesota, Caen, Vienna, Aix-en-Provence and Geneva.

In the following years she performed several new roles at major opera houses including *The Countess* (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and *Donna Elvira* (*Don Giovanni*) at the Opera national de Lyon, *Tatjana* (*Eugene Onegin*) in Wasa, *Marie* (*Wozzeck*) in Nice, *Jenny* (*Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*), *Donna Clara* (*The Dwarf* by Zemlinsky) and *Marietta* (*Die Tote Stadt* by Korngold) in Nancy, and *Mimi* (*La bohème*) in Helsinki.

In 2012 Helena Juntunen received particular acclaim for her interpretation of the role of Grete in Schreker's *Der ferne Klang* at her debut with Strasbourg's Opera national du Rhin, but also for her *Nedda* (*Pagliacci*) with Finnish National Opera in 2014. In Savonlinna she made a remarkable debut as *Cio-Cio-San* (*Madama Butterfly*) in the same summer.

Juntunen's concert repertoire highlights include Mendelssohn's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Lucerne Festival with Vladimir Jurowski), Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and Strauss' *Four Last Songs* (Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Leif Segerstam). Her performance of Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* brought her debut with the Berliner Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Donald Runnicles.

Helena Juntunen's particular attachment to the music of her native country does not only show in numerous appearances in concerts with Finnish orchestras and conductors such as Esa-Pekka Salonen, Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Leif Segerstam, Osmo Vänskä, Mikko Franck and Hannu Lintu, but also in a number of world premieres of Finnish operas and recordings of Finnish music, such as complete recordings of Einojuhani Rautavaara's operas *Aleksis Kivi* and *Auringon talo*.



Helena Juntunen



Osmo Vanska. Photo by Joel Larson courtesy Minnesota Orchestra

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

OSMO VÄNSKÄ conductor

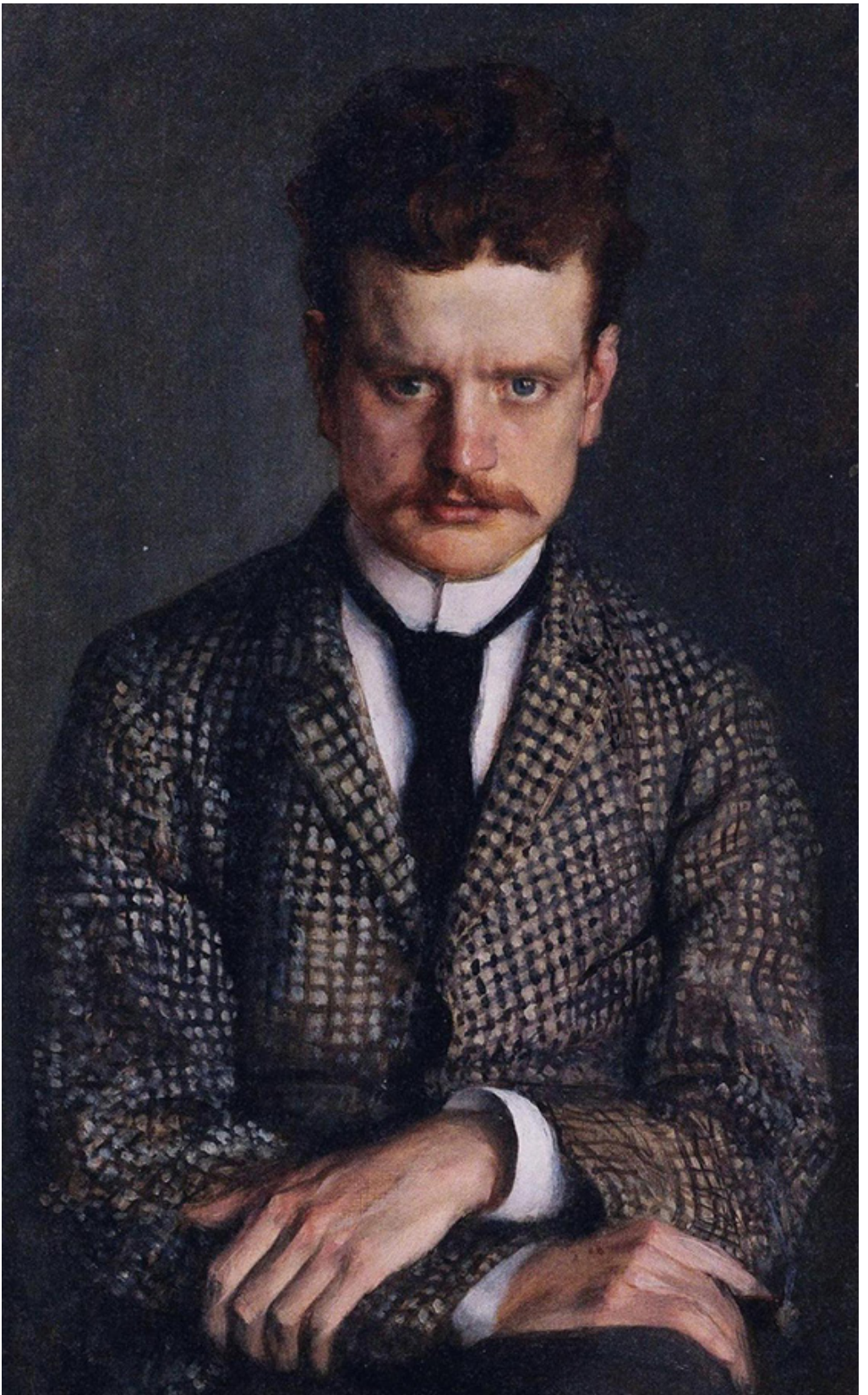
Conductor Laureate of Minnesota Orchestra, where he held the Music Directorship for 19 years, and Music Director of Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra from 2020-2023, Osmo Vänskä is recognised for his compelling interpretations of repertoire of all ages and an energetic presence on the podium. His democratic and inclusive style of work has been key in forging long-standing relationships with many orchestras worldwide.

Performances of Mahler's Symphony No.8 with Minnesota Orchestra in June 2022 provided a fitting culmination for Vänskä's tenure as Music Director. Together they undertook five major European tours, as well as an historic trip to Cuba in 2015 – the first visit by an American orchestra since the two countries re-established diplomatic relations. They also made a ground-breaking tour to South Africa in 2018 as part of worldwide celebrations of Nelson Mandela's Centenary – furthermore the first visit by an American orchestra – drawing together South African and American performers in musical expressions of peace, freedom, and reconciliation on a five-city tour. Vänskä and Minnesota Orchestra also made an acclaimed return to the BBC Proms in Summer 2018.

A distinguished recording artist for the BIS label, Vänskä has recorded all of Mahler's symphonies with Minnesota Orchestra. The Fifth Symphony received a Grammy nomination in 2017 for Best Orchestral Performance. Vänskä and Minnesota Orchestra have also recorded the complete symphonies of Beethoven and Sibelius to critical acclaim, winning a Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2014 as well as being nominated on several occasions. In 2021 they were voted *Gramophone's* Orchestra of the Year.

Vänskä studied conducting at Finland's Sibelius Academy and was awarded first prize in the 1982 Besançon Competition. He began his career as a clarinettist, occupying the co-principal chair of Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra. He regularly performs chamber music, and has recorded Bernhard Henrik Crusell's three Clarinet Quartets and Kalevi Aho's Clarinet Quintet for the BIS label and is in the process of recording several duos for clarinet and violin which he has commissioned with his wife, violinist Erin Keefe.

Vänskä is the recipient of a Royal Philharmonic Society Award, the Finlandia Foundation's Arts and Letters award, and the 2010 Ditson Award from Columbia University and the Pro Finlandia medal awarded to him by the State of Finland. He holds honorary doctorates from the Curtis Institute of Music, and the universities of Glasgow and Minnesota, and was named Musical America's 2005 Conductor of the Year. In 2013, he received the Annual Award from the German Record Critics' Award Association for his involvement in BIS's recordings of the complete works by Sibelius.



Portrait of Jean Sibelius by Eero Järnefelt (1892)

ABOUT THE MUSIC

WHO WAS JEAN SIBELIUS?

Finland had been under Swedish rule since the 13th century, and by the 17th had a Swedish gentry and administrative class, into which Sibelius was born in 1865. In 1809, however, Finland was ceded to Tsarist Russia and became an autonomous Grand Duchy. Initially Russia had encouraged the use of the Finnish language – a non-Indo-European language related to Hungarian, rather than Swedish – but by the end of the 19th century ruled in increasingly repressive fashion. This was a response to, but inevitably inflamed, the growing movement for national self-determination, and Sibelius soon found himself an important symbol of that cultural resistance.

Coming from the Swedish minority, Sibelius had been largely unaware of the richness of ‘ethnic’ Finnish culture until he became engaged to Aino Järnefelt, whose family was very pro-Finnish, in 1890. The Järnefelt family introduced Sibelius to the mythological and literary culture of the Finns, and the result was a series of works that celebrated *Kalevala*, the Finnish national epic. He was able to create a Finnish musical language out of the drama of its legends, the typical modal patterns of Finnish folk-song (though he never quoted actual folk-tunes) and the rhythmic imprint of its verse, and to blend these elements with the contemporary idioms of Bruckner, Liszt and Tchaikovsky.

Sibelius produced his first major works in the 1890s, and in July 1900, wrote to his wife, Aino, from Germany: ‘I can win a place, I believe, with my music. No, I don’t believe; I know I can’. Having launched his symphonic career, at the turn of the 20th century, Sibelius went to create seven of the most important symphonies of the century (and one of its greatest violin concertos) alternating them with other more programmatically ‘Finnish’ works.

There should have been an Eighth Symphony, and correspondence between the composer and conductor Serge Koussevitzky suggests that it was very nearly complete in 1927 when Sibelius burned the score in what his wife called an *auto-da-fé*.

From then on he produced practically no music for the remaining thirty years of his life. Sibelius had always been profoundly ambiguous about his talent – for every effusion about assembling ‘God’s mosaic’, as he described writing the Fifth Symphony, there is a corresponding note of distrust towards his own work and capability. Moreover, he developed alcoholism fairly early in his career, giving it up (temporarily) only when he was discovered to have tumours growing in his throat as a result of drinking and smoking cigars. He outlived all his doctors, dying in 1957 at the age of 91.

In western Europe, he was increasingly ignored or vilified by modernist composers and commentators as the century went on, while in the USA he was held up as the virile antagonist to the ‘decadent, neurotic’ music of Schoenberg and his followers. And, sadly, tastemakers in the Third Reich saw in him a ‘masculine’ composer whose work derived from ‘blood and soil’, tainting Sibelius by an association that appalled him.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Pohjola's Daughter, Op.49 (1906)

Composed between his second and third symphonies, *Pohjola's Daughter* received a triumphant premiere in 1906 at the Mariinsky Theatre, St Petersburg, under Sibelius' baton.

The previous year Sibelius had begun work on a tone-poem about the Finnish goddess Luonnotar, though the 1913 work of the same title for soprano and orchestra that we hear tonight uses none of its material.

At the same time he had received the libretto for an oratorio, *Marjatta*, from poet Jalmari Finne, based on the traditional Finnish retelling of the life of Christ. 'Jesus' is born to an unwed peasant girl, Marjatta, grows up to be wiser than the legendary hero Väinämöinen, becomes king of Karelia and is spectacularly raised from the dead.

That project came to naught, but Sibelius used some its material in this tone-poem inspired by a legend of Väinämöinen.

The hero travels to the Arctic land of Pohjola, which is evoked by the low-register music of the work's opening. He hears the Maiden of Pohjola, or Daughter of Nature, spinning thread – the aurora borealis, perhaps – on her spindle in the sky, which Sibelius depicts by a sudden change to bright, polyphonic woodwind textures. Dazzled, Väinämöinen begs the maiden to descend to earth, but she agrees to do so only if Väinämöinen performs certain miraculous tasks such as making a boat out of her spindle. Despite his Herculean efforts, which we hear in the score, Väinämöinen fails, but is ennobled by his courage and fortitude and continues on his lonely path as at the start.

Pohjola's Daughter is scored for a large orchestra consisting of two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, two cornets, two trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, harp, and strings.

The work was premiered on 29 December 1906 in St Petersburg, with Jean Sibelius conducting the Mariinsky Theatre Orchestra.

The Sydney Symphony first performed it under Chief Conductor Eugene Goossens in August 1954, again in May 1965 under Paavo Berglund, and most recently in October 1979 under Leif Segerstam.

Sibelius' songs

Sibelius composed a considerable number of songs, of which he wrote that 'my songs can also be sung without words. They are not so dependent on words as the songs of many other composers', though this should be taken with a grain of salt, as a feature of his work is the immediate way in which his music responds to the emotional – often mystical and/or erotic – content of the text, and especially in those songs that he orchestrated.

Sibelius set poetry in Finnish and in German, but mostly in his first language, Swedish. As Glenda Dawn Goss notes:

Sibelius' debt to the literature of Scandinavia runs deep. One need look no further than his song texts: the Swedes Viktor Rydberg and Ernst Josephson take second place only to the Swedish-speaking Finns JL Runeberg and KA Tavastsjerna.

The work of Viktor Rydberg (1828–95) has been described by Daniel M Grimley as a 'characteristically *fin-de-siècle* mixture of nature mysticism, inner psychological drama and Nordic myth' and his poem **Höstkväll (Autumn Evening)** provides the text for a masterful setting. In amongst the finely detailed imagery (visual and aural) of nightfall by a remote lake a solitary traveller, like a figure in a Caspar David Friedrich poem, is dwarfed by the sublime landscape. Sibelius composed the song for voice and piano in 1903, but made versions for string and symphony orchestras a year later.

Sibelius' orchestration of *Höstkväll* is scored for two oboes, two clarinets, one bass clarinet, two bassoon and contrabassoon; four horns and three trombones; percussion, harp, strings and soprano soloist.

The work was premiered on 14 January 1905 in Paris, with Alfred Cortot conducting and American soprano Minnie Tracey as soloist.

This is the work's Sydney Symphony premiere.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Höstkväll, Op.38 No.1

Solen går ned,
och molnen vandra` med vefullt sinne
hän över skummande sjö,
över susande skogars skymning.
Måsen skriar på ödsligt skär
falken dväljes i klyftans skygd
trött att jaga han gömt sin näbb
i vingens av skurar tyngda dun.
Solen gick ned,
det mörknar allt mer över moens furor,
mörknar om bergen,
där ränniln suckar i ljung och mossor.
Tvinsjukt dröjer ett gulblekt sken
över västliga kullars rand.
Dagens viskande avsked tonar
sorgset i tätande skuggor bort.
Regnets fall på hållarna
sorlar av vemods sägner
födda av molnens jord
kringsvävande skumma tankar;
sjöns emot stranden brutna våg
brusar av dunkla ödens gång,
röster, skälvande hemskt av smärta,
ropa i stormen ur skogens djup.
Ensam ute i öde nejd
mot fuktig klippa lutad,
står förtrollad en vandrare,
lyss och njuter.
Känner hans själ en samklang
med sången, som höjes
av stjärnlös natt?
Dör hans ve som en sakta ton
i höstens väldiga sorgedikt?

Viktor Rydberg

Autumn Evening

The sun goes down
And the clouds wander in woeful mood
Beyond the foaming lake,
Over twilight of sighing forests.
The seagull screams on a desolate rock,
The falcon stays in his crevice,
Tired of hunting, he hides his beak
In the rain-heavy down of his wing
The sun went down,
It darkens over moorland pines.
Darkens round the mountains,
Where the rivulet sighs in moss and heather.
A sallow gleam stays languishing
Over the rim of the western hills.
The whispering day's farewell
In thickening shadows fades sadly away.
The falling rain on the rocks
Murmurs with gloomy tales,
Born of the earth in the clouds
Overhanging, darkening thoughts;
The lake's wave breaking on the shore,
Clamorous with gloomy fortunes past,
Voices dismally trembling in pain
Call in the storm from the forest's deep.
Out alone in a desolate place,
Against a damp rock leaning,
A wanderer stands enchanted
And listens with pleasure.
Does his soul feel the harmony
With the song that is raised by
the starless night?
Does his grief die like a gentle note
In the mighty autumnal lament?

Translation: John Skinner

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Hertig Magnus is part of a set of eight songs, Op.57, setting poetry by Sibelius' 'other' favourite Swede, Ernst Josephson (1851-1906), that date from three years after the poet's death. Sibelius orchestrated this one in 1912, though the score was lost until 1994.

Duke Magnus is version of a common folkloric figure – the man lured into the

depths (of, in this case, a Swedish lake) by a water-nymph. He comes to no harm though, and is found 'slumbering on the shore' the next morning.

Hertig Magnus is scored for two flutes, two clarinets and two bassoons; four horns; timpani, percussion and strings.

This is the Sydney Symphony premiere of the orchestrated version of the work.

Hertig Magnus

Hertig Magnus från sitt fönster
drömmande ser Vätterns bölja,
månbelyst och sval och klangrik
slottets fasta murar skölja;

tunga kval hans själ förvirrat,
att sin gode far han mistat,
och att blod i strömmar flutit
för hans bröders skull, som tvistat.

Hertig Magnus från sitt fönster
ser i vattnets ljusa dager
liten sjönymf ljufligt vaggas,
sjungande och fri och fager

Hertig Magnus, » så hon sjunger,
kom till mig från slottet höga,
att ditt ädla sjuka hjärta
i den svala böljan löga,

låt mig kyssa få din tinning,
sköna prins, låt dig beveka,
kasta dig i mina armar,
på gullharpan skall jag leka!

Hertig Magnus från sitt fönster,
tjusad utaf nymfens fågring,
sprang i vattnet, lät sig föras
af sin undersköna hägring,

bars omkring tills morgon grydde,
af den väna vattenanden,
och blef funnen bland violer,
oskadd, slumrande på stranden.

Ernst Josephson

Baron Magnus

Baron Magnus at his window
Of the waves of Vettern dreaming,
Watches them surround his castle,
in the moonlight palely gleaming.

Sorrow hath his soul enfouled,
that his father's life is going,
And that blood in brothers' quarrels,
in red rivers should be flowing.

Baron Magnus from his window,
where the moonlight palely gleameth,
Sees a mermaid gently rocking,
beautiful and free she seemeth.

"Baron Magnus," thrice she calleth,
"Come to me thy castle leaving;
I will banish all thy sorrow
where my cooling waves are heaving.

Let me kiss thee on thy forehead,
Come my Prince O come to me,
I will hold thee to my bosom,
on golden harp will play to thee."

Baron Magnus from his window,
listened to the mermaid calling,
Saw her beauty, came towards her,
through the gleaming waters falling.

There until the morrow's dawning
Safe he wandered in her keeping,
and was found by those who sought him,
gently on some violets sleeping.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Våren flyktar hastigt is a setting of poetry, in Swedish, by the Finn, Johan Ludvig Runeberg, whose work, as Sibelius wrote at the time he was composing his Op.13 songs, was 'the most real of everything I've read up to now'. This song is a variation on the Romantic theme of time's deprecations – 'time flies swiftly...let us only love now'.

Våren flyktar hastigt is scored for two flutes, four horns and strings.

The piano and voice version of this piece was performed by Swedish soprano Birgit Nilsson and pianist Geoffrey Parsons on October 6, 1973, during the celebrations for the opening of the Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

This is the Sydney Symphony premiere of the orchestrated version of the work.

Våren flyktar hastigt

Våren flyktar hastigt,
Hastigare sommarn,
Hösten dröjer länge,
Vintern ännu längre.
Snart I sköna kinder,
Skolen i förvissna
Och ej knoppas mera.
Gossen svarte åter:

Än i höstens dagar
Gläda vårens minnen,
Än i vinterns dagar
Räcka sommarns skördar.
Fritt må våren flykta,
Fritt må kinden vissna,
Låt oss nu blott äska,
Låt oss nu blott kyssas.

Johan Ludvig Rineberg

Springtime flieth swiftly

Springtime flieth swiftly,
Swifter still the summer;
Long the autumn tarries,
Longer still the winter;
Soon, oh, cheeks so beauteous,
Shall you have to wither,
Never more to blossom.
Then the youth made answer:

Still in days of autumn
Springtime's memories cheer us;
Into days of winter
Reach the summer's harvests;
Spring is free to vanish,
Free the cheek to wither,
Let us only love now,
Let us only kiss now!

**English translation © E. Magnusson
provided via Oxford International Song
Festival (www.oxfordsong.org)**

ABOUT THE MUSIC

***The Bard*, Op.64 (1913)**

The Bard comes from a time when Sibelius was seeking to refine his ideas to the finest texture, discarding any musical impulse that was superfluous to his creative needs.

The music he wrote from 1905 onwards still displays traces of the emotional expansiveness that had made his first two symphonies so popular, but is more concentrated in feeling: in the warmth of the *Belshazzar's Feast* incidental music (1906) or the vigour of *Night-Ride and Sunrise* (1907) there is music of great passion. It was this palpable rushing of the blood that is so much less evident in much of his music from the Fourth Symphony (1911) onwards. *The Bard* is one of this series of works, written after Sibelius had a series of operations for suspected throat cancer.

One of the striking things about the Fourth Symphony to Sibelius' contemporaries was its profoundly interior attitude to its listeners. It gives off so much less heat than its predecessors that it remains one of his most enigmatic pieces even today. *The Bard* was created only two years later and, although it is not at all a bleak work, it inherited some of the Fourth Symphony's terseness of expression. In its quiet concentration, it also looks forward to the intense, compact world of the Seventh Symphony.

The Bard lasts only eight minutes, rarely rises above *mezzo-piano* in volume and takes up 19 pages of score. There is no overt program, yet in its apparent simplicity the music is evocative of a kind of stoic heroism. The harp plays a crucial role (and is perhaps the character of the Bard) from the opening bars, when a rising three-note motif on clarinets and a small rising and falling theme on violas announce the melodic material with which Sibelius will fashion the piece. Towards the end of the work a brief, false middle section ushers in a sudden change of mood, before the atmosphere of the opening is briefly recalled. The trumpets and trombones are used hardly at all, but are heard powerfully at the climax of the work.

The Bard is scored for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet and two bassoons; four horns, two trumpets and three trombones; timpani, bass drum and tam-tam; harp and strings.

It was first performed in Helsinki on 27 March 1913 by the Philharmonic Society Orchestra, conducted by Jean Sibelius himself, but he revised it in 1914. The new version was first performed in Helsinki on 9 January 1916, again under the baton of the composer.

This is the work's Sydney Symphony premiere.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Luonnotar, Op.70 (1913)

It will not help a listener readying themselves for their first encounter with *Luonnotar* to be told that the work is a setting of a creation story. The Sibelius of, say, *En saga* (1892) or the *King Christian* music (1898) might have conceived such a setting in Romantic terms; might have thought of it, musically speaking, as an inexorable movement from darkness to radiance. But the more Sibelius developed his craft, the more individual his musical utterances became.

In its word-setting and structure, *Luonnotar* implies that the act of creation may be an act of futility. This is one of the reasons the work is rarely performed. It is also extremely demanding for the soloist and is very brief. But it is unique and extraordinary, and a key work in our understanding of Sibelius' music.

The piece is inspired by the legend of the heavens' creation, as told in the *Kalevala*. *Luonnotar*, daughter of the heavens, lives alone in the emptiness of space. She comes to Earth and for hundreds of years roams the world's oceans as mother of the waters. Suddenly a great wind whips the waters and, in her distress, *Luonnotar* calls on Ukko, the Father of the Heavens, for help. Then a bird flies across the skies searching for a place to nest. *Luonnotar* lifts her knee; the bird nests there and hatches her egg. *Luonnotar*'s knee becomes hot and shakes convulsively; as it does, the bird's nest rolls into the waters and breaks. From the egg, beauty is born. The white becomes the moon, the yolk the sun, the mottled shell the stars.

Luonnotar's subject is detailed here because of Sibelius' re-ordering of the original *Kalevala* verses: the narrative order is somewhat obscured in the composer's version.

He wrote *Luonnotar* for one of the most esteemed Finnish musical figures of the day, soprano Aino Ackté. She had been Salome in the first London production of Strauss' opera and was a notable Wagner singer. After she received the score of *Luonnotar* she expressed some concern about the work's difficulty. 'It has swept me off my feet – but, at the same time, I am so very frightened that I will not be equal to its demands, for it is madly difficult and my otherwise sure sense of pitch may fail me.' The work's publishers, Breitkopf and Härtel, must have realised that performances were going to be infrequent. Despite the work's critical success at its Gloucester Festival premiere, *Luonnotar* was originally published in a voice and piano score only.

The work opens with a brief, murmurous passage that suggests the soloist's subsequent description of the void that preceded creation. In halting phrases, over long pedal points, she sings of *Luonnotar*'s loneliness – a passage evocative of parts of the Fourth Symphony's harmonic landscape – before the extended section describing the gull's flight. This begins with a dancing flute theme but soon we hear the haunting, wordless cries of the gull's distress. The climax, at the words 'the waves will sweep my nest away' is followed by the most enigmatic part of the work, for where the narrative culminates in the creation of beauty, Sibelius' response is halting, distant, almost monastic; its chant-like atmosphere gradually clears to a resolution suggesting the possibility of light rather than the certainty of radiance.

Luonnotar is scored for two flutes (each doubling piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons; four horns, two trumpets and three trombones; two timpani, harp, strings and soprano soloist.

The work was premiered on 10 September 1913 at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester, England, with Herbert Brewer conducting the festival orchestra and Finnish soprano Aino Ackté as soloist.

The first and only previous performance by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra was in November 2004, with Vladimir Ashkenazy conducting and Australian soprano Merlyn Quaque as soloist.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Luonnotar

Olipa impi, ilman tyttö,
kave luonnotar korea.
Ouostui elämätänsä,
aina yksin ollessansa,
avaroilla autioilla.
Laskeusi lainehille,
aalto impeä ajeli,
vuotta seitsemän satoa.
Vieri impi ve'en emona,
uipi luotehet, etelät,
uipi kaikki ilman rannat.
Tuli suuri tuulen puuska,
meren kuohuille kohotti.
Voi poloinen, päiviäni,
parempi olisi ollut
ilman impenä eleä.
Oi Ukko, ylijumala,
käy tänne kutsuttaessa!
Tuli sotka, suora lintu,
lenti kaikki ilman rannat,
lenti luotehet, etelät.
Ei löyä pesän sioa.
[Ei! Ei! Ei!]
Teenkö tuulehen tupani,
aalloillen asuinsijani?
Tuuli kaatavi tupasen,
aalto viepi asuinsijani.
Niin silloin ve'en emonen
nosti polvea lainehesta.
Siihen sorsa laativi
pesänsä, alkoi hautoa.
Impi tuntevi tulistuvaksi,
järkytti jäseniänsä:
pesä vierähti vetehen,
katkieli kappaleiksi.
Muuttuivat munat kaunoisiksi:
munasen yläinen puoli
yläiseksi taivahaksi,
yläpuoli valkeaista
kuuksi kumottamahan;
mi munassa kirjavaista,
ne tähiksi taivahalle.

The Nature-Spirit

There was a virgin, daughter of the air,
beautiful spirit of Nature.
She grew weary of her life,
dwelling forever on her own
in those wide and vast deserts.
She stepped down onto the billowing waters,
and the waves carried the maiden
for seven long centuries.
There she swam as water-mother,
swam north-west and south,
swam to all the shores of the air.
There rose a great gust of wind,
whipping the billowing sea into foam.
O how wretched is my fortune,
better that I had remained
a virgin in the air so high.
O Ukko, greatest of all gods,
come this way as I call you!
There came a scaup, a graceful bird,
she flew across all the shores of the air,
flew north-west and south,
finding no place to nest.
No! No! No!
Shall I build my home in the wind,
shall I nest upon the waves?
The wind will overturn my home,
the waves will sweep my nest away.
So then the water-mother
raised her knee from the waves.
There the scaup now made her nest,
sat on her eggs to keep them warm.
The maiden felt her knee burn hot,
and she shook her limbs:
the nest rolled down into the water,
shattering into small fragments.
The eggs transformed into beautiful things:
the eggshell's upper half
became the heavens above,
the egg white's upper half
became the shining moon;
and that which was mottled
became the stars in the sky.

Translation: Hanna-Mari Latham © 2004

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Sibelius in his 30s

Lemminkäinen Suite (*Four Legends from the Kalevala*), Op.22

The Sibelius heard most frequently in live performance and on radio is an orchestral composer. It seems surprising, then, to find him writing to the poet JH Erkko in 1893:

Music attains its fullest power only when it is motivated by poetic impulse. In other words, when words and music blend. Then the vague atmosphere music engenders becomes more defined and things can be said that not even the most powerful can formulate.

Under the spell of Wagner's music dramas, the young Sibelius had decided to fulfil his ambition to create an opera on a grand scale, *The Building of the Boat*, from a legend in the Finnish national epic, the *Kalevala*. Sibelius was clearly fired by the Wagnerian possibilities inherent in his proposed tale of a young Finnish hero, his amorous adventures, tests of bravery and journeys to the underworld. Following his initial work on the opera,

Sibelius visited Bayreuth, and was overwhelmed by *Parsifal* and, even more so, by *Tristan und Isolde*, of which he wrote to his wife Aino: 'Nothing...made as overwhelming an impression. It leaves one feeling that everything else is pale and feeble by comparison.'

Sibelius wrestled with *The Building of the Boat* for more than a year, and his correspondence records his varying moods of elation and despair as he begins to master his material, falters as he doubts the strength of the dramatic structure (for he had written his own scenario) and finally gives up on the piece altogether. Perhaps his most telling remark during this period, when Wagner's overwhelming influence awed and exasperated him, was: 'Liszt's view of music is the one to which I am closest. Hence my interest in the symphonic poem.'

So it was that four orchestral works – known collectively as the *Four Legends from the Kalevala* – emerged from the wreckage of the *Boat*. The best known, *The Swan of Tuonela*, is a re-casting of the *Building of the Boat's* overture, but all are infused with musical ideas originally devised for the spectacular adventures of the would-be opera's hero Väinö. They are souvenirs of a period in Sibelius' composing life when vivid and varied orchestral colour still meant a great deal to him. Although his orchestral palette would become more restrained in the decades to come, he would always hold these pieces in much affection. Indeed, towards the end of his life, Sibelius remarked that the *Legends* were worthy to stand as one of his symphonies. Their shared musical language and quasi-symphonic layout – with the *Swan* serving as slow movement and the third legend, *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela*, as a grim *scherzo* – make of the four 'movements' a cohesive whole.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

The *Legends* were performed together in April 1896. Sibelius revised them before a further performance in 1897, and continued revising them intermittently until 1937. The Second World War held up publication of all the *Legends* together until 1954.

The pieces concern themselves with the exploits of Lemminkäinen, the most famous hero in the *Kalevala* epic, described by one annotator as ‘a jovial, reckless personage whose intrepidity and beauty made him the favourite of women’. We hear, in turn, of his journeys to the enchanted island of Saari (where he sows more than one wild oat) and to Tuonela, the land of the dead; his resurrection there, aided by his mother’s magic powers; and his return home. Sibelius is interested primarily in the atmosphere of the original stories, and does not follow a detailed program.

The influence of *Tristan und Isolde* is most clearly evident in the first two legends. The first, *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens of Saari*, opens with two gleaming chords, scored for horns only, that seem to welcome us into a landscape of legend. By the time a series of rising chords resolves on the harmonies that opened the work, we have passed through the portals that lead to the main part of the movement, for we then hear a dance-like theme on the woodwind over a gentle, rustic string accompaniment. A mood of passionate brooding soon follows with a dark, lush theme for the strings: we may assume that our hero has made the maidens’ acquaintance. The main melodic material, now declaimed ardently by the cellos and basses, develops an increasingly intense energy as Sibelius continues to delay any definitive harmonic resolution. This is the most overtly operatic music in the *Legends*, like a love duet without singing, and the shadow of *Tristan* hovers perceptibly over proceedings. The whole movement now takes on the character

of a gradual crescendo, with the rustic dance, much more impassioned, interwoven with sensuous developments of Lemminkäinen’s love music. The work ends quietly and expectantly, with woodwind carollings sending the hero on to his next adventure.

Where the first *Legend* is quite lavishly orchestrated, *The Swan of Tuonela* represents Sibelius’ ability to achieve a unique sound picture by a distinctive treatment of relatively modest orchestral resources. Tuonela is the land of death, surrounded by black waters on which the swan glides, singing. Trumpets, clarinets and flutes are absent. There is a bass clarinet where there was none in the first *Legend*. But it is the cor anglais solo that dominates everything here. It has been argued that, without the inspiration of the opening of Act III of *Tristan und Isolde*, Sibelius would not have written *The Swan of Tuonela* this way. This is a matter of externals. Where the Wagner is full of human pain and longing, the landscape here recalls Neville Cardus’ remark: ‘The scene and drama of the music of Sibelius are nature.’ The first and second violins are frequently divided into four groups each, which, great writer for strings that he was, Sibelius employs to indelible effect. Where other composers of this period might use multiple string choirs to create an impression of lushness, Sibelius evokes something cold, ancient and complete. Parts of *The Swan of Tuonela* anticipate the chant-like sonorities Vaughan Williams would create in his *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*.

ABOUT THE MUSIC



Lemminkäinen's Mother (1897) by Akseli Gallen-Kallela (1865–1931)

Lemminkäinen in Tuonela is the most macabre of the *Kalevala* episodes Sibelius chose to illustrate. Setting out to kill the swan, Lemminkäinen is himself killed, cut into pieces, and thrown into the black river. Lemminkäinen's mother then combs the river with a rake, gathers up the pieces of her son's body and magically sews them back together. The sense of mystery and menace is evoked in the opening tremolando theme played by double basses and cellos. The melodic ideas that follow do nothing to release the tension, until a gentler theme for strings introduces a more contemplative mood, perhaps created by the arrival of Lemminkäinen's mother. There is a tremendous sense of conflict.

Lemminkäinen's Return is the most vigorous of the four pieces, a *moto perpetuo* of great drive and rhythmic energy. Like much of Sibelius' music it grows from a tiny germ-like motif. First played by the bassoon, in its extended

form this theme is given out brazenly by the brass just before the piece rushes to its exhilarating conclusion. The imagery *Lemminkäinen's Return* intends to evoke is very easy to picture in the mind's eye.

The Lemminkäinen Suite (*Four Legends from the Kalevala*) is scored for two flutes (both doubling piccolo), two oboes (one doubling cor anglais), two clarinets (one doubling bass clarinet) and two bassoons; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, triangle, bass drum, cymbals, tambourine, glockenspiel, harp, and strings.

It was premiered on 13 April 1896 in Helsinki, with Jean Sibelius conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic Society.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra has performed these pieces many times, both individually and as a complete suite. Notable early performances include those led by John Barbirolli in December 1950, Bernard Heinze in May 1945 and Eugene Goossens in November 1947 (*The Swan of Tuonela*); our most recent performance of the complete Suite was with Chief Conductor Vladimir Ashkenazy in February 2013.

Notes by Gordon Kerry (Sibelius biography © 2024, *Pohjola's Daughter* © 2013, Songs © 2024) and Phillip Sametz (*The Bard* © 1994/2011, *Luonnotar* © 2004, *Four Legends from the Kalevala* © 2002)

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MUSICIAN PROFILE



VICTORIA BIHUN

Violin

How long have you been playing with the Sydney Symphony?

I joined as a Fellow in 2015 and never left!

What has been the highlight of your Sydney Symphony career so far?

Playing with Augustin Hadelich in 2022 was an incredibly inspiring week. Anything with Janine Jansen turns me into a kid in a candy store. And I'm a huge *Star Wars* fan so playing those scores is always a highlight.

What do you like to do with your spare time when you aren't playing or practicing?

I would like to say I have some really cool hobby, but in reality I just like to eat great food with my friends and family and snuggle my cats until they get sick of me.

What was the last book, podcast or TV series you really loved?

I'm a sucker for true crime, so my podcast listening is pretty grim. The last book I read (actually, listened to) was *Olive, Mabel and Me* by Andrew Cotter. And currently my husband and I, from the comfort of our couch, are enjoying passing judgement on the contestants from the TV series *Physical 100*.

What is the best piece of advice you ever received – either musical or general?

"People aren't thinking about you the way that you're thinking about you."

– Alexis Rose.

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