Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor **| Lisa Batiashvili,** violin

Thursday, October 21, 2021, 11 am | Orchestra Hall
Friday, October 22, 2021, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Donghoon Shin
The Hunter's Funeral — ca. 10'
[in two untitled movements]

Karol Szymanowski
Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35 — ca. 25'
[in one movement]
Lisa Batiashvili, violin

I N T E R M I S S I O N — ca. 20'

Carl Nielsen
Symphony No. 4, Opus 29, *The Inextinguishable* — ca. 36'
[in one movement]

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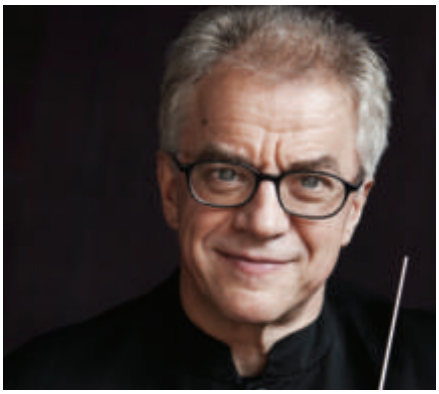

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 8.

Lisa Batiashvili, violin

Georgian-born German violinist Lisa Batiashvili is the artistic director of Audi Summer Concerts in Ingolstadt, Germany. For the 2020 season, she originally designed a program to celebrate the festival's 30th anniversary year, as well as Beethoven's 250th birthday under the motto "Lights of Europe." Due to the global pandemic, an adjusted version with streamed concerts under the motto "Together for Music" featured Batiashvili and other leading musicians, sending out a strong message of solidarity and adaptability. Batiashvili regularly appears on stage with orchestras including the Berlin Philharmonic, London Symphony Orchestra, Vienna Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Symphonieorchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks, Staatskapelle Dresden, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa and Boston Symphony Orchestra, among others. Recording exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon, her latest album *City Lights* was released in June 2020. The project marks a musical journey that takes listeners around the world to eleven cities with an autobiographical connection and music ranging from Bach to Morricone, and Dvořák to Charlie Chaplin. More: harrisonparrott.com.

one-minute notes

Shin: *The Hunter's Funeral*

This contemporary work was inspired by an 1890 woodcut of animals carrying the coffin of a hunter. The music gradually changes color from bright to dark, with the dance-like opening full of energy before the emergence of a slower funeral march in which, by the end, melodies become obsolete amid undulating, vanishing strings.

Szymanowski: Violin Concerto No. 1

The First Violin Concerto of Szymanowski is a work of passion and lyricism. Its single movement opens with brilliant flashes of sound, then continues with hints of humor and extended passages of joyful, carefree song.

Nielsen: Symphony No. 4, *The Inextinguishable*

Nielsen's Fourth Symphony captures the essence of the human spirit and its capacity for endurance and resilience in a single movement that moves through plaintive melodies, turbulent storms and brilliant light.

Donghoon Shin

Born: 1983, Seoul, South Korea

The Hunter's Funeral

Premiered: June 21, 2017

The history of creative arts is rich with cross-pollination: composers, poets, dancers, painters and creators in other disciplines often find inspiration from one another's works. In the subset of orchestral music inspired by visual arts, the most well-known example may be Maurice Ravel's orchestration of Modest Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, whose movements are based on the drawings and watercolors of Viktor Hartmann.

A less common but intriguing scenario arises when a single work of visual art inspires multiple composers to create their own very different musical responses, sometimes across generations and genres. Van Gogh's famous painting *The Starry Night* provoked orchestral works by classical composers Henri Dutilleux and Einojuhani Rautavaara as well as the song *Vincent (Starry Starry Night)* from folk-rock singer-songwriter Don McLean, showing that there can be multiple ways to "hear" a work of visual art. Today's program showcases another example (possibly) along these lines with the U.S. premiere of *The Hunter's Funeral* by contemporary London-based South Korean composer Donghoon Shin—who was inspired by a 19th-century woodcut that may also have caught the eye of Gustav Mahler over a century ago.

a fast-rising career

Shin, who was recently named winner of the prestigious Claudio Abbado Prize, has developed a close rapport with Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä, who this week brings Shin's music to Orchestra Hall for the first time. Vänskä is also music director of the Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra, and he has conducted Shin's music with that ensemble as well as with the Helsinki Philharmonic.

Although Shin is still pursuing his Ph.D. studying with Sir George Benjamin at the King's College London, his international career is already flourishing, with commissions and performances coming from the London Symphony Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Helsinki Philharmonic, Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic and Spanish National Orchestra. His upcoming projects including a co-commission from the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra and Bamberg Symphony Orchestra, slated for its initial performances in 2022 and 2023. In May 2022 his Concerto for Cello and Orchestra will be premiered at a gala concert to mark the 50th anniversary of the Karajan Academy of the Berlin Philharmonic.

Shin pursued his earlier studies in composition at Seoul National University with Sukhi Kang and Uzong Choe, and with Julian Anderson at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. His other mentors have included Peter Eötvös and Unsuk Chin, the latter of whom will have two works performed by the Minnesota Orchestra this season: *subito con forza* in October and *Frontispiece* next February.

Shin's recent works include *Of Rats and Men* for chamber orchestra, commissioned and premiered by the Karajan Academy of the Berliner Philharmoniker under the direction of Peter Eötvös, and *Kafka's Dream* for the London Symphony Orchestra conducted by François-Xavier Roth.

notes from the composer

The Hunter's Funeral is another fairly recent composition of Shin's, receiving its premiere performance on June 21, 2017, with Patrick Bailey conducting the Philharmonia Orchestra at Royal Festival Hall in London. Spanning ten minutes, it is scored for 12 players: two winds, two brass, harp, piano, an array of percussion instruments (including the special effect of crotales played on timpani); and one representative from each of the orchestra's five string sections. Shin offers the following comments on the composition's origins, form and connections to other works of art:

"For a long time, I have been fascinated by different types of funeral march music in diverse cultures. What intrigues me is the irony in this specific genre. Melody and harmony in minor keys express sorrow and remorse while a rhythmic feature repeats itself underneath, evoking slow dance music. Many composers were interested in this irony. For instance, in the third movement of Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 1, what starts as funeral music turns into a sarcastic dance. According to the Mahler scholar Constantin Floros, Moritz von Schwind's woodcut 'The Hunter's Funeral' (1890) was possibly the inspiration for this music.

"*The Hunter's Funeral*, scored for 12 players, is my response to the same woodcut. It depicts animals carrying a coffin of a hunter in a solemn march. This paradoxical scene gave me a strong inspiration for the piece. It starts with a very simple and rather mundane pitch cell, C-D-E-F. The harmony structure and the melodies in the piece are all derived from the simple pitch cell, which gradually changes colour from bright to dark.

"The music is divided into two movements with no gap in

between. The first movement has a fast and rhythmic feature like dance music—groovy, sharp and energetic. The tempo of the dance music gets slower and a funeral march emerges in the second movement. Over the repetitive rhythm of the strings, the melodies in the woodwinds and the brass dominate the movement. In the final section, the melodies become heterophonic and eventually obsolete."

Instrumentation: flute (doubling piccolo), clarinet, horn, trumpet, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, 2 bongo drums, 2 congas, hi-hat, glockenspiel, vibraphone, marimba, crotales on timpani, harp, piano, 2 violins, viola, cello and bass

Program note by ***Carl Schroeder****.*

Karol Szymanowski

Born: October 3, 1882, Tymoszówka, Ukraine
Died: March 29, 1937, Lausanne, Switzerland

Concerto No. 1 for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 35

Premiered: November 1, 1922

If Edward Elgar's Violin Concerto is in spirit the last of the great 19th-century examples of the genre (its actual calendar date is 1910), Karol Szymanowski's Violin Concerto No. 1, written in 1915-16, is the first in an amazing series of truly 20th-century violin concertos that would, over the next 25 years, come to include masterpieces by Stravinsky, Berg, Prokofiev, Sessions, Schoenberg, Bartók, Bloch, Barber, Britten, Hindemith, Piston, Walton and Hartmann among others—not to forget Szymanowski's own Second Violin Concerto of 1932.

The voice behind Szymanowski's two concertos is that of Paweł Kochański, fiery and sweet-toned virtuoso, and one of the most admired violinists in a brilliant time. The plan was for Kochański, who wrote the cadenza for Szymanowski's First Violin Concerto and to whom the work is dedicated, to give the first performance in St. Petersburg at the end of 1917, but the Russian Revolution got in the way. The premiere finally took place in Warsaw on November 1, 1922, with Józef Ozimiński as soloist and Grzegorz Fitelberg conducting.

Szymanowski was a member of an interestingly lively and talent-filled family. He studied first with his father, who played cello and piano, and with another musical relative, Gustav Neuhaus, but it was really in the course of travel, independent study and quite simply experience that his true education began. He had been brought up on the three B's plus Chopin and, surprisingly for so conservative an environment, Scriabin. Now his horizons expanded to embrace Wagner, Strauss and Reger, then Debussy and Ravel, eventually and crucially Stravinsky, whose *Firebird* and *Petrushka* he saw in their original productions by Sergei Diaghilev, about whom he wrote the first serious articles in Polish, and who became a friend as well.

a language all his own

Szymanowski's music moved away from German Romanticism to become—what? To say "more French" would be both true but also too limiting, for what he wrote, in words as well as music, more and more reflected his contacts with cultures removed in time and place from 20th-century Europe. He had made long journeys through Sicily, with its evocative remnants of the Greek and Byzantine worlds, and through North Africa. He read the Greek classics, Plato and histories of the Byzantine, Islamic, Roman and early Christian worlds. Admiring Bartók and what he was doing for and with Hungarian music, Szymanowski began to study and imaginatively to utilize Polish folk music.

In sum, Szymanowski drew on many sources, but fused them into a colorful, malleable language all his own. The *Myths, Songs of a Fairy Tale Princess, The Song of the Night* (Symphony No. 3), the Violin Concerto No. 1, the opera *King Roger* and the *Stabat Mater*, to name just a handful of the most important scores, amount to a legacy of unusual diversity, imposing originality and expressive strength.

the concerto: a poem

Szymanowski cast his First Violin Concerto as a single movement of about 23 minutes' duration. The analytical ear and eye readily enough distinguish different sections and the recurrences of certain ideas, but what the spontaneous listening ear responds to is the seamless, self-generating flow. (In what might seem paradoxical, violinist and conductor must be fully aware of the former in order to create the impression of the latter.)

The dominant impression is that of an intensely lyric, enchantingly colorful music that is in constant flux. The work is as much a poem as it is a concerto, being in fact based on a rhapsody, *Summer Night*, by one of the composer's literary contemporaries, Tadeusz Miciński. *Summer Night* is a feast of fantastical images—donkeys in crowns settled majestically on the grass, fireflies kissing the wild rose, and many birds—and it is not surprising that the sounds often come close to those in Bartók's haunting "night musics," such as we find in works from the piano suite *Out of Doors* to the Third Piano Concerto.

Christopher Palmer has vividly described the opening in his Szymanowski monograph for the *BBC Music Guides*: "Its fantastic little dashes and flashes of sound, bitonally propelled, fluttering and dancing like a thousand tiny fires, suggest endless parallels, musical and otherwise: a distant fireworks display; a *pointillist* canvas; an imperial Fabergé jewel aglitter with sequins; César Franck's wonderful definition of the nervous appeal of Debussy's music as 'de la musique sur la pointe des aiguilles,' music on needlepoints."

When Szymanowski first actually heard this music in rehearsal in Warsaw he was thrilled and wrote to Kochański: "The sound is so magical that people here were completely transfixed. And just imagine, Paweleczka, *the violin is continually on top*." With the magic of the fireflies goes the ecstasy of lyric song. The concerto is a work of white-hot passion, set in a magical landscape inhabited by, among others, the figure of Pan, part humorous, part threatening, whom Szymanowski invokes so wonderfully in the third of the Myths. Szymanowski said that the true national music of his country was not "the stiffened ghost of the polonaise or mazurka, nor a fugue on the *Chmielu wedding* song…but the solitary, joyful, carefree song of the nightingale in a fragrant night in Poland." In this concerto, he set that ecstatic song down for us to share.

Instrumentation: solo violin with orchestra comprising 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 3 clarinets (1 doubling E-flat clarinet), bass clarinet, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, bass tuba, timpani, triangle, tambourine, snare drum, cymbals, bass drum, glockenspiel, celesta, piano, two harps and strings

Excerpted from a program note by the late ***Michael Steinberg****, used with permission.*

Carl Nielsen

Born: June 9, 1865, Sortelung, Denmark
Died: October 3, 1931, Copenhagen, Denmark

Symphony No. 4, Opus 29, *The Inextinguishable*

Premiered: February 1, 1916

Although Carl Nielsen composed in nearly every form, including opera and chamber music, he was first and foremost a symphonist. In 1914 he stepped down from his post as conductor of the Royal Opera in Copenhagen. As he continued to teach and assist in the governance of the Copenhagen Conservatory, he also applied himself to a new symphony, his fourth, which he called *Det Undslukkelige* (The Inextinguishable).

The Fourth Symphony's subject is the human spirit, and what he deals with is the human capacity for endurance, for survival. As he began to draft a work intended to flow in one great movement—"in a single stream," he stressed, when he spoke of his concept: "I have an idea for a new work, which has no program, but will express what we understand as zest for life or expressions of life; that is, everything that moves, that desires life, which can be called neither good nor bad, high nor low, big nor small, but only 'that which is life' or 'that which desires life'…"

a disintegrating world

The Fourth Symphony evolved between 1914 and 1916, turbulent years in which, Nielsen observed, "the whole world is disintegrating," and "national feeling, which hitherto was regarded as something lofty and beautiful, has become like a spiritual syphilis that has devoured the brains, and it grins out through the empty eye sockets with moronic hate."

It was a time of inexorable change. The world would never be the same, and the Romanticism of the nineteenth century disintegrated. Such turmoil in the atmosphere bred Nielsen's boldest work, a score reflecting both political tensions and his own personal strife. He had just resigned from his conducting post, unable to deal with the administrative harassment that spoiled his love for his work. But also his marriage to the sculptor Anne Marie Brodersen seemed to be falling apart, though their union was salvaged after all. In such stressful times—and you will sense their impact as the symphony gets underway—he managed to complete his Opus 29 by January 14, 1916.

Born the seventh son of a house painter and village fiddler, Nielsen absorbed the local folk tunes and dances, and by age 14 he became a bugler in the local regimental band. The mature Nielsen was faithful to melody as he tried to function within the conservatism of his time and place. It was a struggle, for his impulses were those of a modernist and highly independent artist, and while his efforts ultimately were rewarded with laurels from his country, he remarked in a 65th birthday interview that if he had to do it all over again, he would have sold butter and eggs instead.

Like Sibelius, the aging Nielsen witnessed in some bewilderment the rapid disintegration of the old systems. However, his belief in the viability of the symphony in this century never wavered and he implicitly delivers this credo in the Symphony No. 4 in a grandly original way. He proceeds like a born symphonist who once had been under the spell of Brahms, for he constructs his mighty work from concise motifs, the traditional building blocks of the musical architect. The symphony is technically in one uninterrupted movement, but the four large sections of this cyclical score are linked dramatically as well as thematically, as they unravel a tonal destiny which proceeds from the starting point of D minor to the triumphant E major of the close.

the music: not a moment to waste

At the *Allegro*'s start, not a moment is wasted in plunging us into the fray. The symphony seems to start right in the middle of things, with a plaintive motive from the winds centered around D, while the strings hold fast to their own subject, with C at its core. A combative spirit drives the symphony to a swift crescendo. Countering this violence, a second group of themes, of a lyric cast, brings an outpouring of melody. Chief among these attractive themes is a strain calmly flowing from the clarinets. Mark it well, for this subject, in constant permutations, makes a resplendent return before the close.

From early on, the timpani asserts itself with threatening force, prophetic of the stellar role it will play in the finale. A substantial development gathers momentum to unleash a violent storm. In the long stretch to the reprise the dissonant clouds seem to recede. The second theme group returns in even grander terms, and in the twilight moments of the opening section first violins forge a link to the next, underlaid by the rhythmic beating of the timpani.

A quiet, more rational interlude focuses on two chief ideas: first a low-keyed dance tune, genial rather than exuberant, and later a sudden cry from the violins, whose arioso, drawn in a long, taut line, is underlaid by the throbbing timpani. The contrapuntal texture of Nielsen's most austere thoughts grows increasingly dense, and a mighty crescendo absorbs the entire orchestra. After quieter gestures, the violins suddenly spin to life in a brilliant passage that makes way for the final *Allegro*.

Dealing with the complex subject of tonal structure in Nielsen symphonies, Harald Krebs points out that the most astonishing example of final resolution in his works occurs in the Fourth Symphony. The composer's basic strategy is to introduce ever more obvious references to material from the beginning of the work, but outside the chosen final key of E; ultimately he resolves these reminiscences, as well as the finale's own subjects, in the predestined key of E.

High drama reigns in this finale, as an angry theme shatters its grandeur and a formidable presence intrudes—a second pair of timpani. In a footnote, Nielsen instructs both timpanists to project a menacing tone, not only in the hail of their salvos but even when they are playing quietly. Impending chaos intensifies the core of the movement, whose fate, however, turns out to be triumph after all, compressed into the great lyric theme that has never strayed far.

Writing for the London *Times*, a reviewer summed up the impact of this work after Nielsen led a Queen's Hall performance in 1923: "The whole frame of the symphony quivers with a vigor which propels it from the beginning to the end of a vast and impassioned musical sentence."

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, 2 sets of timpani and strings

Program note by ***Mary Ann Feldman****.*