

# Minnesota Orchestra

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Elina Vähälä, violin

Friday, January 7, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

Saturday, January 8, 2022, 8 pm | Orchestra Hall

## All works composed by Jean Sibelius

Symphony No. 6 in D minor, Opus 104	ca. 27'
Allegro molto moderato	
Allegretto moderato	
Poco vivace	
Allegro molto	
Concerto in D minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 47 (1903-04 early version)	ca. 38'
Allegro moderato	
Adagio di molto	
Allegro, ma non tanto	
<i>Elina Vähälä, violin</i>	
I N T E R M I S S I O N	ca. 20'
Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Opus 39	ca. 36'
Andante, ma non troppo - Allegro energico	
Andante, ma non troppo lento	
Scherzo: Allegro	
Finale (quasi una fantasia): Andante - Allegro molto	

### pre-concert

Solo piano performance and remarks by Ruusamari Teppo, a direct descendent of Jean Sibelius

Friday, January 7, 7 pm, Auditorium

Saturday, January 8, 7 pm, Auditorium

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of [YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio](#), including KSJN 99.5 FM in the Twin Cities.





**Osmo Vänskä**, conductor

Profile appears on page 8.



**Elina Vähälä**, violin

Born in the U.S. and raised in Finland, Elina Vähälä made her orchestral debut with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra at the age of 12 and was later chosen by Osmo Vänskä as the orchestra's Young Master Soloist. Since then, her career has continued to develop on the international stage, winning praise from audiences and musicians alike. She appears regularly with all of the key Finnish orchestras as well as being a guest of countless high-profile orchestras around the globe such as the Houston Symphony, Vancouver Symphony, Yomiuri Nippon Symphony

Orchestra, Beethoven Orchester Bonn, Dortmund Philharmoniker, Istanbul State Symphony, Malmo Symphony Orchestra, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg and RTVE Spanish Radio Orchestra. She has toured throughout the U.K., Finland, Germany, China, Korea and South America. The 2021-22 season sees her return to the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra and Seoul International Music Festival as well as her debuts with the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra and Pannon Philharmonic. She also appears at the festivals in Tampere, Clandeboye and Oulu, where she has recently been appointed artistic director. More: [dispeker.com](http://dispeker.com), [elinavahala.com](http://elinavahala.com).

### one-minute notes

## Sibelius: Symphony No. 6; Violin Concerto (original version); Symphony No. 1

Jean Sibelius' Sixth Symphony is unusual in several ways: it contains no slow movement, and in it, instruments are scored primarily in their upper ranges, contributing to a sense of weightlessness. The third movement stands out as a particularly virtuosic tour de force.

The rarely-performed original version of Sibelius' Violin Concerto is significantly different from the familiar, finished version: most notably it is longer, and the soloist's part is more overtly virtuosic. Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Osmo Vänskä played a central role in the rediscovery of this work, when in 1991 Sibelius' heirs permitted Vänskä and Finland's Lahti Symphony to give one live performance and make a recording.

Sibelius' First Symphony balances Classical economy with Romantic gestures. The symphony opens with a long, dark clarinet melody. After a second movement rich in Romantic sonorities, the *Scherzo* brings dramatic accents and vast dynamic contrasts. Lush and impassioned themes rule in the *Finale* before the music, now seeming disjunct, closes on a haunting note.



## Jean Sibelius

**Born:** December 8, 1865,  
Tavastehus, Finland

**Died:** September 20, 1957,  
Järvenpää, Finland

### Symphony No. 6 in D minor, Opus 104

**Premiered:** February 19, 1923

Sibelius' Sixth Symphony, like his Third, is performed less often than the others. Concertgoers expecting to encounter the epic majesty of Symphony No. 1, the grand heroism of Nos. 2 and 5 or the gaunt austerity of No. 4—all far better known than the Sixth—are in for a surprise.

#### a symphony of paradoxes

Instead, a cool, rarefied air seems to surround the Sixth in music of purity and luminescence. Textures are transparent, colors are muted, orchestral forces are modest, and instrumental ranges are often directed toward the upper end of the spectrum rather than the lower.

It is also a symphony of paradoxes. Despite a predilection for the upper range, this is Sibelius' only symphony to incorporate a bass clarinet, which is used frequently as part of the woodwind choir. Despite the transparent textures, it is a work richly imbued with polyphony inspired by 16th-century masters like Orlando de Lassus and Palestrina. Despite the composer's original intention to make the Sixth "wild and impassioned in character," it displays these qualities only rarely, even though there is no "slow" movement and very little slow music in the whole symphony.

The symphony was completed in February of 1923 and received its first performance on February 19 in Helsinki, with the composer conducting. The score is dedicated to the great Swedish composer Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927).

#### the music: harmonic tension and pervasive scales

**allegro molto moderato.** The opening bars display several of the qualities described above, including polyphony (in five parts), the concentration on the upper range (violins divided into four parts plus violas as the "bass" voice) and the prominence of the Dorian mode, a mode of the medieval church. Two additional features of this opening material must be noted, features that will continue through the entire symphony: the pervasive use of scales, and a "germ motif," which is found in so many of Sibelius' works. In this case, it is the first four notes played by the upper half of the

second violin section; this four-note sequence will play a more significant role than that of any of the principal themes, and will in fact be absorbed into most of them.

Although lyrical in character, this opening material is not thematic. The first true theme arrives only somewhat later: a scurrying figure heard initially in the flutes and immediately imitated a notch lower by the oboes, all to the notable accompaniment of the harp, which Sibelius had used only once before in a symphony (the First). Here we encounter still another of the Sixth Symphony's paradoxes, for this theme is in neither D Dorian nor D minor, but C major! The harmonic antithesis between the Dorian mode and C major will constitute one of the principal sources of tension in the movement. There is a further theme in B minor (a lyrically rising and falling line for the cellos), but it is now obviously going to be useless to attempt to force this movement into the Procrustean bed of a textbook sonata form.

**allegretto moderato.** The second movement abounds in the veiled, remote, "cool" sounds so beloved by Stravinsky in many of his neoclassic works. There is much use of the harp, scales and scalelike fragments are omnipresent, and a gentle melancholy seems to hover over the music.

**poco vivace.** In contrast to the nearly indefinable meters of the second movement, the third is rhythmically alive and invites body movement. It is also a tour de force of orchestral virtuosity, requiring a Mendelssohnian lightness of touch and almost airborne fleetness.

**allegro molto.** The finale opens with a quasi-heroic statement. In the course of this free-form movement we encounter the symphony's most passionate and exuberant passages (the only moment marked *fff* is found here), but the final moments are given to quiet reflection of earlier material as the textures become ever sparer, dissipating into the serene silence of infinity.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets,  
bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones,  
timpani, harp and strings

Program note by **Robert Markow**.

## Concerto in D minor for Violin and Orchestra, Opus 47 (1903-04 early version)

Premiered: February 8, 1904

This week's concerts offer a rare chance—the first ever at Orchestra Hall—to hear Sibelius' Violin Concerto as it was originally composed and premiered in 1904, while next week's performances feature the concerto's substantially rewritten final form of 1905 in which it is almost always played.

### nearly lost to history

The original version of Sibelius' Violin Concerto might have been lost to history—the composer forbade further performances in a 1904 edict—were it not for the diligent efforts of Swedish-based BIS Records and conductor Osmo Vänskä. BIS' landmark Sibelius Edition, a multi-decade project overseen by founder Robert von Bahr, is among the most ambitious recording initiatives focused on a single major classical composer: a comprehensive effort to record every piece Sibelius wrote, including numerous works that had never previously been recorded.

Sibelius' heirs were supportive of the project, and in 1991 they permitted Vänskä, Finland's Lahti Symphony and soloist Leonidas Kavakos to record the original version of the Violin Concerto and give one live performance. That recording on the BIS label—which paired the concerto's original and final versions—earned high acclaim including a 1991 Gramophone Award. The Sibelius estate's restrictions have since loosened, although performances still remain rare: a 2015 rendition by Australia's Queensland Symphony Orchestra was billed as only the third public performance.

### stung by criticism

It's no coincidence that Sibelius' only concerto is for violin: as a young man he had aspired to be a celebrated violinist, but a failed audition for the Vienna Philharmonic in 1891 put an end to his original dream. Little more than a decade later, Sibelius had become a cultural hero in Finland after the successful premieres of works such as his *Kullervo*, *Finlandia* and the first two symphonies—and it was then that he set on writing a concerto that would showcase the instrument of his youth in its full virtuosic glory.

Sibelius conducted the Violin Concerto's premiere in Helsinki on February 8, 1904, and it did not go as he had hoped. The music proved too challenging for the soloist, Victor Nováček, and an attending critic whose opinion Sibelius highly valued, Karl Flodin, declared the concerto “a mistake,” criticized in particular its difficult virtuoso components, and offered the final judgment that “the concerto is, to be honest, boring, something which could not hitherto be said of a composition by Jean Sibelius.” Stung by

the critique, Sibelius withdrew the concerto and set to work on revisions. The final version was introduced on October 19, 1905, with Richard Strauss conducting the Berlin Court Orchestra and soloist Karel Halíř, and this version of the concerto has become a cornerstone of the 20th-century violin repertoire.

### the key differences

Following is a condensed version of the late Finnish musicologist Erkki Salemenhaara's description of the key differences between the original version of the Violin Concerto and its successor, from the 1991 BIS album of both works:

“In his work of revision [Sibelius] acted precisely according to the guidelines suggested by [Karl] Flodin. The greatest difference between the first and the second versions is that in the second Sibelius dispensed with a striking amount of the virtuoso element in the solo part. More concretely, he discarded the first movement's second, Bach-like solo cadenza entirely. In the finale, too, he made significant cuts.

**allegro moderato.** “In his revision of the first movement the composer took away not only virtuoso but also musical elements. A short, sweetly Mendelssohnian interlude was cut out entirely. The final motif of the exposition underwent a genuine transformation; it was intended as a codetta or as the final theme's third motif. In the original version it has a higher rhythmic profile with an incisive Beethovenian sonority and sharply dotted rhythms. In the recapitulation of the first version a muscular Beethovenian passage is constructed out of this same motif which recurs right at the end of the movement. In the final version all that remains of the motif in its sharply rhythmic form is a brief reminder of the final bars of the first movement, where it appears as if by surprise.

“In the first version, in the transition to the cadenza which takes the place of the development, there remains a ‘gap’ which the composer did not completely succeed in filling, even in the second version with its rhythmically smoother motif. Another striking alteration is that in the original version the short ‘cadenza’ which follow the main theme is accompanied all the time by a rhythmic figure from the orchestra, prefiguring the main theme of the finale.

**adagio di moto.** “The least changes were made to the slow [middle] movement, the beauty of which had been especially praised by reviewers of the first performance. The length of the movement is the same in both versions, and the differences appear mostly in the reduction of the solo part's ornamental aspects and the omission of a short final cadenza in the final version.

**allegro ma non tanto.** “In the finale, the present-day listener will be surprised by the omission of a fresh Beethovenian idea which is



situated after the main theme. It leads to a short recapitulation of the main theme, which is not present in the final version, and after which we progress to the subsidiary theme. A few virtuoso touches have also been removed from the finale. Changes have been made to the orchestration in all three movements: generally speaking, the first version has a darker, more massive sound.”

### in summary

Salmenhaara concluded with a general assessment: “The first version of Sibelius’ Violin Concerto is more dramatic, more virtuosic and more Beethovenian than the established version. It may also be rougher, more rugged and not as symphonically integrated as the second version. Without a doubt, however, it possesses its own fascination....it shows in a definite form the furnace in which [the concerto] was forged, where a genius worked.”

**Instrumentation:** solo violin with orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings

Program note by *Carl Schroeder*.

## Symphony No. 1 in E minor, Opus 39

Premiered: April 26, 1899

Few first symphonies can claim the boldness, masterly symphonic thought and originality as that of Jean Sibelius. Only Brahms, Mahler and perhaps Schumann can stand next to him in this regard. Sibelius’ first essay in the genre was also his first major abstract composition, begun in April 1898 and completed early in 1899. The composer himself conducted the successful premiere in Helsinki on April 26, 1899. The symphony, the famous *Finlandia*, and two of the *Legends* met with such enthusiastic receptions that the Finnish government granted the composer a lifetime pension so that he could devote himself entirely to composition. Sibelius was not yet 36 years old.

The dark, craggy power of this work, its evocation of the magic spell of the North, the romantic melodies and its spirit of bardic sagas have stirred many writers to poetic commentary. Here is Robert Bager’s description: “The work abounds in contrasts. Herein is represented the unfettered, mercurial thinking of a young symphonist....The young composer pours great melodies into his work, melodies that sing with an exultant joy, melodies that rise and fall with tremendous intensity, and also melodies that are nostalgic and mellow and suffused with a tender pathos. There are grace and lightness in the music as it comes rushing to the creator’s pen. There are also wild, barbaric shouts, outbursts of tremendous passion, raging unbridled utterances that hurl themselves forward like the roar of giant winds.”

### the music: beginning with clarinet

**andante, ma non troppo – allegro energico.** The symphony opens with a long, haunting melody for the solo clarinet, accompanied only by the distant rumble of timpani as a pedal point (a device Sibelius uses often). To the leading Sibelius scholar, Erik Tawaststjerna, this melody “rises in a broad arch and dips like a wounded bird in flight, before fading and disappearing in a primeval mist.” The sense of aching loneliness and bleakness imparted by this introduction is characteristically Sibelian, and is found frequently in his music. Also characteristic is the length of this theme, which seems almost to grow organically out of itself.

When the *Allegro* main section begins, we find still another Sibelian touch—a theme beginning in the violins with a long, sustained note, and gathering momentum toward the end in quicker notes. The theme is of ambiguous tonality, sharing qualities of E minor and its relative major, G. The theme’s coiled tension is fully released when the entire orchestra presents this idea in splendid glory. Three more themes appear in this richly melodic exposition.

**andante, ma non troppo lento.** The slow movement is built largely from the initial theme—a slowly rocking, melancholic line played first by violins and cellos with mutes, which give an added tinge of greyness.

**scherzo: allegro – lento, ma non troppo.** The *Scherzo* looks back to Bruckner in its insistent pounding character, and even further back to Beethoven’s Ninth in the use of frequent melodic outbursts from the timpani. The central trio section stands in marked contrast in its idyllic mood, tonality (E major as opposed to the C-minor *Scherzo*), tempo (*lento*) and thinned-out texture.

**finale (quasi una fantasia): andante – allegro molto.** For the *Finale*, we return to the symphony’s opening gesture: that long, solo clarinet line—but played now by the entire string section (minus the basses) in a grand, heroic manner punctuated by solemn brass chords. Two strongly contrasted ideas are presented and developed: a springy, dancelike motif with syncopated rhythms, and a deeply expressive, soulful theme played first by the combined violin sections on the G string for extra warmth and sonority. The symphony builds to a monumental climax, but ends abruptly—with a strange, sudden tapering off and two pizzicato chords in the strings, just as did the first movement.

**Instrumentation:** 2 flutes (both doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle and strings

Program notes by *Robert Markow*.