

june 2, 3, 4

Vänskä and Keefe

Minnesota Orchestra and Sphinx Virtuosi

Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Erin Keefe, violin | Juho Pohjonen, piano

Thursday, June 2, 2022, 11 am	Orchestra Hall
Friday, June 3, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall
Saturday, June 4, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall

Xavier Foley *Ev'ry Voice* ca. 6'
Sphinx Virtuosi

Alberto Ginastera *Finale furioso*, from Concerto for Strings ca. 5'
Sphinx Virtuosi

Felix Mendelssohn Concerto in D minor for Violin, Piano and Strings ca. 36'
 Allegro – Andante (Recitativo)
 Adagio
 Allegro molto
Erin Keefe, violin
Juho Pohjonen, piano

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

Jaakko Kuusisto Symphony ca. 20'

A program note on Jaakko Kuusisto's Symphony is provided in an insert.

The national Sphinx Virtuosi Tour is made possible with the generous support of JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Robert F. Smith, with additional support from National Endowment for the Arts.

CD Signing: Join us in the Orchestra Hall lobby following the June 4 concert as Osmo Vänskä will sign the Orchestra's Mahler Symphony CDs, including the newest release of Mahler's Tenth Symphony.

pre-concert	Concert Preview with Phillip Gainsley Thursday, June 2, 10:15 am, Auditorium Friday, June 3, 7 pm, Auditorium Saturday, June 4, 7 pm, Auditorium
thank you	The Minnesota Orchestra is grateful to The Daniel N. and Constance B. Kunin Fund for supporting the commissioning of Jaakko Kuusisto's Symphony. This concert is co-sponsored by Karen and Stanley Hubbard .

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. The May 6 concert will also be broadcast live on [Twin Cities PBS \(TPT-2\)](#) and available for streaming at minnesotaorchestra.org and on the Orchestra's social media channels.



Osmo Vänskä, conductor

Profile appears on page 10.



Erin Keefe, violin

Erin Keefe, the Minnesota Orchestra's concertmaster since 2011, is a highly-regarded soloist, chamber musician and festival artist. Her recent solos with the Orchestra have included performances of Massenet's *Meditation* from *Thaïs*, Weill's *Violin Concerto*, Dvořák's *Romance*, and Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* with violist Matthew Lipman. She has been awarded the Avery Fisher Career Grant, the Pro Musicis International Award, and the Grand Prize in the Valsesia Musica International Violin Competition, Torun International Violin Competition, Schadt Competition and Corpus Christi International String Competition. She is an Artist with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and performs locally with the Accordo ensemble. As a guest concertmaster, she has appeared in recent seasons with the New York Philharmonic, Pittsburgh

Symphony, Seoul Philharmonic and São Paulo Symphony Orchestra. In fall 2022 she will take an additional role as a distinguished faculty member of the Curtis Institute of Music. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.



Juho Pohjonen, piano

Finnish pianist Juho Pohjonen, who is widely regarded as one of today's most exciting instrumentalists, performs widely in Europe, Asia and North America, collaborating with symphony orchestras and playing in recital and chamber settings. He performed at the Minnesota Orchestra's season-opening concerts in September 2019 and on tour at Indiana University the following January. Last October he performed Daniel Bjarnason's piano concerto *Processions* with the Helsinki Philharmonic under the composer's baton. Other highlights of his 2021-22 season include performances with the Colorado Symphony, two chamber music concerts at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and appearances on the Parlance Chamber Concerts and Cliburn Concerts series, as well as recitals in Helsinki and at Vancouver Recital Society. In 2019 he launched MyPianist, an AI-based iOS app that provides interactive piano accompaniment to musicians everywhere. His most recent recording with cellist Inbal Segev features cello sonatas by Chopin and Grieg, as well as Schumann's *Fantasiestücke*. More: juhopohjonen.com, kirshbaumassociates.com.



Sarah Hicks, broadcast host

For the concert on Friday, June 3, Sarah Hicks serves as host and writer of the Twin Cities PBS broadcast and online livestream, *This Is Minnesota Orchestra*, of which she has been the primary on-camera host and writer since the series launched in fall 2020. Hicks, who is the Minnesota Orchestra's principal conductor of Live at Orchestra Hall, has led a broad range of programs since joining the Orchestra as assistant conductor in 2006. Her notable projects here have included co-creating the *Inside the Classics* and *Sam & Sarah* series with Orchestra violist Sam Bergman; conducting a live-in-concert recording with singer-rapper Dessa; and leading original Orchestra programs and *Movies & Music* concerts. A specialist in film music and the film in concert genre, she premiered *Pixar in Concert* and Disney-Pixar's *Coco in Concert*. Her live concert recording of *A Celebration of the Music of Coco* at the Hollywood Bowl can be seen on Disney+ and her work on *The Little Mermaid Live* was broadcast on ABC. More: minnesotaorchestra.org.



Sphinx Virtuosi

The Sphinx Virtuosi are the nation's most dynamic, exhilarating professional chamber orchestra dedicated to increasing racial and ethnic diversity in classical music. Comprised of 18 of the nation's top Black and Latinx classical soloists, the Virtuosi are primarily alumni of the internationally renowned Sphinx Competition, and its members work together as cultural ambassadors reaching new audiences. This unique ensemble earned rapturous reviews from *The New York Times* during its highly acclaimed debut at Carnegie Hall in 2004, and they have returned to Carnegie Hall annually since 2006, performing to sold-out audiences and earning additional outstanding reviews from *The New York Times* each year.

Acting as a bridge between minority communities and the classical music establishment, the Sphinx Virtuosi continue to garner critical acclaim during their annual national tours to many of the leading venues around the country. Inspired by the Sphinx Organization's overarching mission, the Sphinx Virtuosi work to advance diversity in classical music while engaging young and new audiences through performances of kaleidoscopically varied repertoire. Masterpieces by Bach, Tchaikovsky, Vivaldi and Mozart are performed alongside the more seldom-presented works by composers of color, including Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, George Walker, Michael Abels and Astor Piazzolla. The Sphinx Virtuosi's first recording was released in 2011 on the White Pine label and features music of Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Gabriela Lena Frank and George Walker. More: mkiartists.com, sphinxmusic.org.

violin

Patricia Quintero Garcia
Alex Gonzalez
Sandro Leal-Santiesteban
Jaqueline Jove
Meredith Riley
Emilia Mettenbrink
Jessica McJunkins
Maithéna Girault

viola

Celia Hatton
Robert Switala
Andrew Gonzalez
Omar Shelly

cello

Thomas Mesa
Eri Snowden-Rodriguez
Ismael Guerrero
Britton Riley

bass

Chris Johnson
Patricia Weitzel

one-minute notes

Foley: *Ev'ry Voice*

This recent work—an homage to *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, a song often referred to as the Black National Anthem—brings out the sonority and virtuosity of the strings to feature the familiar melodic material, while uncovering new timbres and sounds.

Ginastera: *Finale furioso*, from *Concerto for Strings*

The finale of Ginastera's *Concerto for Strings* is colorful, rhythmic and almost breathless, showcasing folk idioms and changing meters.

Mendelssohn: *Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings*

The piano often takes the lead in this double concerto from the composer's youth, followed closely by violin, and the brilliant conclusion points to the greatness of the composer's mature work.

Kuusisto: *Symphony*

The Minnesota Orchestra commissioned Jaakko Kuusisto—a longtime friend and collaborator of Music Director Osmo Vänskä—to compose a new symphony as a capstone to Vänskä's final season. When Kuusisto passed away tragically in February at age 48, the work was not yet ready for performance, but his brother Pekka Kuusisto, also a renowned composer, has prepared an edition of the music to allow for this poignant world premiere performance.



Xavier Foley

Born: 1994,
Marietta, Georgia

Ev'ry Voice

Composed: 2020

This week's performances begin with a special guest ensemble, the Sphinx Virtuosi, taking the Orchestra Hall stage on its own to perform two works for string orchestra. (The musicians of the Sphinx Virtuosi will then join forces with the Minnesota Orchestra for the remainder of the program.) The performance is the newest development of the deepening bond between the Minnesota Orchestra and the Sphinx Organization, a Detroit-based, nationally-focused social justice organization—founded in 1997 by violinist Aaron Dworkin, and now led by President and Artistic Director Afa S. Dworkin—that is catalyzing change in the classical music world through its various programs that form a pipeline to develop and support diversity and inclusion in classical music. As another result of the connections between the two organizations, during the 2021-22 season the Minnesota Orchestra has welcomed two violinists and a violist selected from the Sphinx Orchestral Partners Auditions for one-year positions.

The Sphinx Virtuosi are deeply committed to the music of today's composers. (The ensemble's longtime composer in residence is Jessie Montgomery, a leading contemporary composer whose music has been heard on numerous Minnesota Orchestra programs in recent seasons.) Among the newest works commissioned by the Sphinx Organization for performance by the Sphinx Virtuosi is *Ev'ry Voice*, written in 2020 by Georgia-born composer and double bassist Xavier Foley.

a passion for performing and composing

Foley, who is a 2014 Sphinx Competition First Prize winner and in 2018 was awarded a prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant, is achieving great success as a composer, performer and educator—and sometimes combines his crafts, including this past March, when he appeared with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra as soloist in the world premiere of his own Double Bass Concerto. He has also been a featured soloist with the Dallas Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, Columbus Pro

Musica Chamber Orchestra, Sphinx Orchestra and the Sphinx Virtuosi, with which he performed at Carnegie Hall and on East and West Coast tours, and he plays often in chamber music settings at major venues. He is a 2016 graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music, where he studied composition and performance with Edgar Meyer and Hal Robinson.

The version of *Ev'ry Voice* for string orchestra on this week's program is one of two that Foley has created for the Sphinx Organization—the other incorporating sung parts for Sphinx's professional vocal ensemble, Exigence. Its title and the basis of its musical material come from *Lift Every Voice and Sing*, the popular hymn that is often referred to as the Black National Anthem. The song's text was written in 1900 by James Weldon Johnson, who later led the NAACP, and was set to music by his brother John Rosamond Johnson—and it became the NAACP's official anthem and deeply intertwined with the African American Civil Rights Movement. The song continues to be well-loved and widely heard today, including with increasing frequency at major American sporting events.

comments from the Sphinx Virtuosi

The Sphinx Virtuosi offered the following description of *Ev'ry Voice* in a program note:

“This piece was created in 2020 as a special feature under Sphinx's program umbrella of ‘Land of the Free,’ which illuminates the wealth of musical talent among American composers. Appearing now as part of our ‘This is America’ digital program, this work has become a beloved standalone. The inspiration for the commission came at a time when the ideals of unity were invoked amidst uncertainty, tragedy, and hope. In his music, Foley brings out the sonority and virtuosity of the string instruments to feature the familiar melodic material, while uncovering new timbres and sounds, almost symbolically encouraging all of us to look and listen anew, beyond the isolation of the global pandemic and the racial and cultural divide in our country. Today's soundtrack is for the hopeful times ahead, ushered in by Foley's new tribute to a treasured piece of the American historical and musical heritage.”

Instrumentation: string orchestra

Program note by **Carl Schroeder**.



Alberto Ginastera

Born: April 11, 1916,
Buenos Aires, Argentina
Died: June 25, 1983,
Geneva, Switzerland

Finale furioso, from Concerto for Strings

Premiered: May 14, 1966

numerous composers of string quartets have later repainted their music on the larger canvas of a string orchestra, which most obviously offers a fuller sound and the added foundation of the bass, while also allowing for added lines and fuller harmonies, if the composer desires. The most famous example of this translation may be Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings, written as the second movement of his String Quartet in 1936 and re-scored seven years later. The same seven-year gap applies to Alberto Ginastera's 1965 Concerto for Strings (*Concerto per Corde* in the original Spanish), which began its life as the String Quartet No. 2 in 1958.

The Concerto for Strings received its premiere on May 14, 1966, at the Third Latin American Music Festival in Caracas, Venezuela, with former Minnesota Orchestra Music Director Eugene Ormandy leading the Philadelphia Orchestra. This week's concerts feature its nearly breathless final movement, titled *Finale furioso*.

Argentine pioneer and international success

Ginastera, widely considered to be Argentina's most revered classical composer, lacked deep family roots in his native country since his parents had immigrated there from Italy—his mother was Italian and father was of Catalan descent—but he was deeply involved in promoting and developing Argentina's musical life. He spearheaded a national league of composers in Argentina and taught at prestigious schools in his home city, and many of his works were inspired by the country's folk music, particularly those in the earlier phases of his career. His domestic musical pursuits were subject to the whims of changing governments, but his international reputation grew steadily as he formed connections through studies in the U.S. on a Guggenheim Fellowship, and he eventually resettled in Switzerland late in life.

The String Quartet No. 2 that evolved into the Concerto for Strings was commissioned by the Elizabeth Sprague Coolidge

Foundation, completed in 1958 and premiered by the Juilliard String Quartet at an international music festival in Washington, D.C. Although the music features rhythms rooted in the dance styles of Argentina, it dates from a period when Ginastera was incorporating more modern techniques such as polytonality and serialism. The Quartet No. 2 also drew inspiration from several of Béla Bartók's string quartets, most notably in the use of folk idioms and an archlike form in which the final movement recalls references from the first movement, and the inner movements refer to each other. Ginastera revisited this music on two occasions, expanding the instrumentation for string orchestra in 1965 (but trimming the number of movements from five to four) and then revising the string quartet to its final form in 1968.

The virtuosic *Finale furioso* featured at this concert is brilliant and frenzied music of perpetual motion, filled with syncopations, changing rhythmic patterns and references to ideas from earlier movements—demanding great virtuosity from the performers in music that is exciting and unpredictable, particularly in a roller-coaster closing minute when the tension ratchets up with each measure.

Instrumentation: string orchestra

Program note by Carl Schroeder.



Felix Mendelssohn

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

Concerto in D minor for Violin, Piano and Orchestra

Premiered: May 25, 1823
(private performance);
July 3, 1823 (public performance)

Like Mozart, Felix Mendelssohn was a miracle of musical precocity from childhood onward. The son of an immensely cultivated family (his grandfather was the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn), he made his piano debut at age 9, had his works performed when he was 10, and at 12 became a friend of Goethe, 60 years his senior. By the early 1820s, the boy—already a prolific composer—was confident enough of his music that he began to publish it.

Just before he began to give his music opus numbers, however, Mendelssohn completed a number of works for orchestra, including 12 symphonies for strings, a violin concerto and two concertos for two pianos. These final years of apprenticeship also produced the Concerto in D minor for Violin, Piano and Orchestra, which Mendelssohn completed of May 6, 1823, three months after his 14th birthday.

a rare combination

The idea of a concerto featuring violin and piano as solo instruments was unusual, though not unknown. The lyric, sustained sound of the violin and the percussive sound of the piano are difficult to combine in a concerto, which may help explain why this particular combination is so rare: Mozart had begun such a concerto, though he gave it up; Beethoven's Triple Concerto features piano, violin and cello.

Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin and Piano offers graceful, accomplished writing for both instruments. The young composer wrote the piano part for himself, and the violin part for his friend Eduard Riez.

the music: piano takes the lead

allegro-andante (recitativo). In the opening *Allegro*, a long orchestra introduction gives way to a brilliant, leaping entrance by the piano, followed quickly by the violin. This sets a pattern that continues throughout the concerto: the piano takes the lead, the violin follows, and both share the development.

adagio; allegro molto. A gentle, tuneful *Adagio* is followed by a vigorous *Allegro molto*, which opens with a brilliant passage for piano. Though the thematic material of this concerto may not be particularly distinctive, the music remains amiable, accomplished and pleasing throughout, an astonishing achievement by a 14-year-old. And—in the brilliance of the final movement—it looks ahead to the music of the more mature Mendelssohn.

Instrumentation: solo violin, solo piano and orchestra comprising 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings

Program note by *Eric Bromberger*.



Jaakko Kuusisto

Born: January 17, 1974,
Helsinki, Finland

Died: February 23, 2022,
Oulu, Finland

Symphony

Premiering: June 2, 2022

This week's performances feature the world premiere of Finnish composer, conductor and violinist Jaakko Kuusisto's *Symphony*, his final work, which he was in the process of composing when he died this past February at the age of 48. His younger brother Pekka Kuusisto, who is also a renowned composer-conductor-violinist, has acted as editor in preparing the performance materials for this premiere performance, for which the conductor's score arrived after this issue went to press; a program note and profile of Kuusisto are provided in an insert.



In September 2017, Osmo Vänskä led the Minnesota Orchestra in an all-Finnish program that included Jaakko Kuusisto's Violin Concerto, featuring soloist Elina Vähälä, for whom the work was composed.

Minnesota Orchestra and Sphinx Virtuosi

Osmo Vänskä, conductor
Erin Keefe, violin | Juho Pohjonen, piano

Thursday, June 2, 2022, 11 am	Orchestra Hall
Friday, June 3, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall
Saturday, June 4, 2022, 8 pm	Orchestra Hall

This week's Minnesota Orchestra concerts feature the world premiere of Finnish composer, conductor and violinist Jaakko Kuusisto's *Symphony*, his final work, which he was in the process of composing when he died on February 23, 2022, at the age of 48. His younger brother Pekka Kuusisto, who is also a renowned composer-conductor-violinist, has completed the work, with the assistance of score technician Jari Eskola. Kuusisto's symphony is 20 minutes in duration and consists of two movements, and is dedicated to Osmo Vänskä and Maija Kuusisto. The following program note by Jaani Länsiö tells the story of this composition and its remarkable journey from conception to premiere. The *Symphony* was commissioned by the Minnesota Orchestra, with additional financial support from Oulun Valistustalorahasto, Oulu and Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra.



Jaakko Kuusisto

Born: January 17, 1974,
Helsinki, Finland
Died: February 23, 2022,
Oulu, Finland

Symphony, Opus 39 (Completed by Pekka Kuusisto)

Premiering: June 2, 2022

The year 2020 taught the world that you cannot win a game of chance by planning. Jaakko Kuusisto discovered just how fragile life could be, in the worst possible way.

“Dear friends, this is something that I hoped I would never have to tell you.”

These were the words with which Jaakko Kuusisto—composer, violinist, conductor, father, husband and friend—began his Facebook post on July 23, 2020. One day earlier he had received a diagnosis that looked bad—really bad.

Jaakko had spent the summer as usual. He had written new music and new arrangements, and above all he had spent time boating on Lake Saimaa, whose waters he loved just as much as those of the Gulf of Finland. Yet he did not feel normal. For a couple of months, he had been suffering from headaches, stumbling over words and becoming fatigued unusually quickly. He had spent the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic studying for a Master of Music degree at the Sibelius Academy, at the age

of 46, and in the midst of the pandemic he had taught himself to use a completely new music notation software package. He had even rescored his opera *Ice*, premiered in the previous year, for smaller orchestra to allow it to be revived in a COVID-safe formation in autumn 2020. The *Symphony* that he had been planning for a long time was also coming together—only certain more urgent commissions had delayed it from being completed well before its planned premiere in June 2022 in Minnesota.

What he was experiencing was no ordinary fatigue, as Jaakko was accustomed to shaking off tiredness and working at full speed in all circumstances. Perhaps it was an ennui brought on by the pandemic, or even an aftereffect of COVID itself. Jaakko was not worried, but his wife Maija could not ignore the symptoms. She saw that something was wrong, so much so that she felt a medical professional should be consulted.

Jaakko had become irritable. Every one of us is in a bad mood now and again, but for him this was completely out of character. That was a red flag so huge that Jaakko finally did go see a doctor, and then another. Detailed examinations revealed the cause of the headaches: a brain tumor almost the size of a chicken egg, a tumor of the worst kind. The kind where the odds of survival are minimal. And while this tumor was in a location where a surgeon could access it—in the right frontal lobe—a complete recovery would be almost unprecedented, and in any case the process would involve years of radiation therapy and medication.

Jaakko had come face to face with almost certain death. The only questions were whether he had months or years left to live and what the quality of his life would be during that time. The doctors were reluctant to make predictions, but Jaakko was well

aware that there was no longer any point in making retirement plans. Since getting better was not an option, the only thing to do was to make the best possible use of the time remaining.

out of your hands

The diagnosis did not throw Jaakko off balance. For as long as his condition would not stop him from working, he would keep his foot on the pedal. He cancelled no commissions and refused no concert bookings. Making music kept his mind alert and his gaze firmly on the horizon, even if he was occasionally reminded of the uncertainty of the future.

Of course, uncertainty is a core feature of the future in any case. “My first reaction to the diagnosis was that a part of my future had been taken away from me,” said Jaakko in his last interview, for a podcast in December 2021. “That was a false conclusion. After all, I could get hit by a car tomorrow. We can’t know. It was more like a warning sign: ‘Remember that these things are out of your hands.’”

The operation went well. Jaakko’s worst fears about losing his ability to speak or to play music did not come true. Still, the tumor was not completely gone: it could mount a new assault at any time. To all outward appearances, Jaakko was his usual self, with only a shaved spot around a four-inch scar on his temple as a reminder of the close call, when he conducted the second round of performances of his opera *Ice* at the Finnish National Opera in autumn 2020.

The opera, based on the eponymous novel by Ulla-Lena Lundberg, is the story of a young and somewhat naïve parish priest, Petter Kummel, who arrives at a small island community in Åland with his family after the war. The story focuses on the inner conflicts of the quarrelling villagers and the priest struggling with his faith, and above it all looms a threat—the harsh environment of the islands, particularly the treacherous nature of the ice when the sea freezes over in winter. Despite repeated warnings, the priest decides to take a short cut across the ice from one island to another one dark night. The ice breaks under his feet. Against all odds, he first manages to free himself from the grasp of the sea and the broken ice, but then he notices that he has lost hold of his briefcase, which contains valuable documents. Choosing to save the briefcase instead of himself, he succumbs to the icy waters. The death of the priest shocks the parishioners into burying the hatchet and finally building a bridge together to the church.

“There’s a lot of truth in that story,” Jaakko had mused in 2019, long before his fatal diagnosis. “The lives of individual humans are ultimately just blips in the big picture. Anyone’s story can end at any time, and when someone’s story ends, the big story goes on almost as if nothing had happened. When you look at the world and at life only from your own perspective, it’s easy to have big ideas about yourself. But ultimately we’re just small and insignificant.”

There is a lot of Jaakko himself in the main character of *Ice* and in its events, beginning with the ever-present seascape and the tragic fate of the priest. Like the priest, Jaakko was a bridge builder in society, a conciliator amidst cultural circles arguing about money, a firm but fair chairman on committees and in

negotiations. For him, artistic creativity was not mutually exclusive with excellent political skills and intelligent conversation. He always kept his temper, even on social media, allowing space and presence and understanding to opposing arguments, bringing a voice of reason to the chaotic shouting matches that public debate tends to descend to these days.

“the orchestra is my instrument”

Although Jaakko had written several operas, chamber works and solo works, what he had been really dreaming of for a long time was writing a symphony for large orchestra. Being an exceptional violinist, he was well acquainted with the potential of his own instrument. Because he never wrote music just for himself, he patiently waited for a commission that would allow him to realize his dream.

Commissions did keep coming. After his Violin Concerto, completed in 2012, it felt like instrumentalists were coming out of the woodwork to request a concerto in the Jaakko Kuusisto style. His catalogue rapidly grew with works featuring solo instruments: the Piano Concerto, the Trumpet Concerto, the Bassoon Concerto.

“Am I really a concerto composer?” Jaakko often wondered. “The large symphony orchestra is my own instrument.” Earlier in his career, he had been Leader of Sinfonia Lahti for no less than 14 years, raising the orchestra to world prominence with conductor Osmo Vänskä. The longed-for opportunity finally came in 2017. The Minnesota Orchestra was to embark on a tour of South Africa celebrating Nelson Mandela in spring 2018 and needed orchestral arrangements of local songs. Jaakko was Vänskä’s first choice, as he had previously arranged dozens of songs by ABBA, Queen and the Beatles for Sinfonia Lahti with great success.

This time, however, Jaakko demurred. He had only recently learned how to say no and to find space for things other than work in his calendar. He also had the opera *Ice* to complete, and cellist Arto Noras was waiting on a Cello Concerto. There simply were not enough hours in the day to accommodate a new commission. But Vänskä would not take “no” for an answer. He would not accept anyone but the best, so he upped the ante.

“So how about we say that you arrange the songs for us, and then the Minnesota Orchestra will commission a symphony from you?” said Vänskä. With that sentence, Osmo suddenly created more hours in the day for Jaakko.

the Symphony unfinished

For many composers, music is second nature. For Jaakko, it came first. He had been holding a violin since the age of 3. Keys, meters and tempos were his native language, and recordings by the old masters were its dialects. His surname identifies him to Finns as a member of a musical dynasty: his grandfather Taneli Kuusisto was a celebrated composer who wrote one of the most beloved Finnish songs of all time, *Suomalainen rukous* (Finnish prayer). His father Ilkka Kuusisto is also a composer and was one of the most influential administrators in Finnish music in the 1970s and 1980s.

Jaakko and brother Pekka, two years his junior, delighted audiences in dozens of TV programs at a very early age, and the

“Kuusisto brothers” became a household name as violinist prodigies in the 1980s. So music came easily. Although Jaakko’s “to-do list” seemed to grow exponentially, he never panicked. He was a seasoned artist who had found a way to complete the work at hand with such efficiency that not even his wife could understand it.

“He would just disappear into his study for a while, and when he came back, whatever thing it was would be finished,” Maija Kuusisto recalls. “He never worried about deadlines, because everything was so easy for him. He was like that at work and at play. But he did say that working on the Symphony was different from his previous projects.”

That was a sign that this composition was more important than the others. Jaakko had previously been used to writing music at the piano, trying out melodies, chords and motifs while staring at a blank piece of music paper. The sheet would gradually fill up with notes, which he would then enter into the computer. He never forced himself to create music. If he had sat for 10 minutes without getting any new ideas, he might simply say out loud, “it’s not coming now,” and do something else. His working hours were dictated by inspiration—yet he never missed a deadline.

He had four years to write the Symphony. The first ideas emerged in 2019, and he wrote down some fragments in 2020, before the diagnosis. The work was of such importance for him that he thought long and hard about all his musical ideas before committing them to paper and then to computer.

After the operation, Jaakko was completely himself. He was able to conduct concerts as normal and even performed as a violinist, but his attitude to composing had changed. Perhaps he had noticed that the tumor had affected his handwriting, or perhaps he did not wish to leave indeterminate sketches behind if it should happen that he was unable to complete them. In any case, he no longer wrote anything down on paper; he simply formulated everything in his head and then entered his internal voice directly into the notation software.

Although you could not see Jaakko’s condition from the outside, it progressed inexorably. He regularly attended examinations, and the news was never good. Time was running short, but Jaakko would not let that affect his work ethic. Maija did note that Jaakko did not sit at the computer as often as before, instead allowing the Symphony to gestate of its own accord. He was still not in a hurry, and was not worried about the deadline in March 2022.

As late as in December 2021, Jaakko was at full working capacity. He had even conducted performances of *The Nutcracker* with the energy of a young man. At Christmas, he played bits of his Symphony for Maija on the piano and mused out loud about how to fashion the overall shape of the piece. Would it be in two movements, or should it be cast in a single movement, like Sibelius’s Seventh Symphony?

He also played bits on the piano that he had not written down anywhere. “I tried to make him write down everything right away,” Maija recalls, “because I could see that he was running out of time.”

The Cello Sonata that he was supposed to deliver in early January was also going nowhere, even though Maija kept reminding Jaakko of that too.

“It’s already finished,” Jaakko said. And that was probably true, in his head, but not in score. Only a few bars of sketch now survive of that Sonata.

Immediately after Christmas, Jaakko’s health abruptly failed. In early January, he was admitted to hospital, and it was clear that he would not be coming home. Maija packed up a bundle of music paper in his things just in case his inspiration returned. But she realized deep down that the Symphony would remain unfinished. It would be up to her to make Jaakko’s dream come true.

where the music comes from

At the point when Jaakko was taken to the hospital, he had less than six months to complete the Symphony. The tumor had begun to encroach on the part of the brain that sorts and arranges memories, images and awareness of the present, and it now took Jaakko on a farewell tour larger than life, independent of time or place. Without leaving the hospital, Jaakko had become a touring musician again: rehearsing with his trio for a concert at Wigmore Hall in London, traveling around Finland conducting symphony orchestras, raising a glass at an afterparty after a successful concert, singing, playing music and cracking jokes with his colleagues.

For most of the time, he was at the Naantali Music Festival in high summer, where he had been a regular visitor for decades. The hospital morphed into Naantali Spa, and the hospital staff became the festival administrators. He was living the high life of an artist—but he was not writing any music. Finally, on February 23, 2022, Jaakko peacefully sailed off to where the music comes from.

the Symphony completed

Maija assembled a two-man team. Jaakko’s younger brother Pekka was probably more familiar than anyone with his style, his thinking and his logic. Music engraver Jari Eskola had been preparing all of Jaakko’s compositions for print and creating orchestral parts for them for a decade. If these two could not manage to complete Jaakko’s unfinished Symphony, no one could. The first thing that Pekka did was to gather up all of Jaakko’s notes, computer folders and tablet files to assemble the disjointed pieces of the Symphony. He soon hit a dead end.

Pekka discovered that the sketches were useless. The material that Jaakko had completed was complete to the last detail. Every slur, accent and dynamic marking was in place. These bits were so well finalized that they could have been published as is. But beyond that, there was only about 40 measures’ worth of sketches.

Half of the symphony was missing. The work was planned in two movements: six minutes of the first movement and four minutes of the second were in existence. Pekka was now faced with the task of inventing music created by Jaakko of which Jaakko had not left the slightest clue.

In examining the Symphony, Pekka discovered that the music contained surprisingly many familiar themes, melodies and even extra-musical inspirations. This was exceptional, as Jaakko had not been in the habit of writing narratives in music or alluding to his earlier works. The Symphony, however, incorporated elements of his past life and reflected the somber turn that his present day had taken.

“Certainly these feelings influence what I put on paper,” Jaakko had said in the interview in December 2021. This realization yielded the tools and the material needed to fill in the gaps in the Symphony. The main thing was to ensure that the bits written by Pekka sounded as if they could have been written by Jaakko.

Everyone who knew Jaakko marveled at how tenacious he was. His condition never eroded his sense of humor, which remained as sharp as ever. His eyes retained the familiar mischievous twinkle, as if he were about to launch into an ultra-pithy witticism—his specialty. If Jaakko had not told everyone about his condition, no one would have known.

Having said that, it is impossible not to notice the impact of Jaakko’s condition when listening to the Symphony. It has dark tones previously absent from his music, flashes of despair and reflections on the unpredictability of life. One of the central elements in the musical material is an ascending tritone, as in Sibelius’ Fourth Symphony—his darkest work, likewise overshadowed by a serious illness.

Over a period of 18 months, Jaakko underwent innumerable MRI scans of his head to monitor the progress of the tumor. The metal tube of the device into which the patient is inserted is cramped and incredibly loud. The noise can be dampened with ear plugs and headphones but not completely blocked. Jaakko came to detest the machine from the bottom of his heart but learned to tolerate it with a method that says everything about his character. While the machine was mapping the pathways of the tumor in Jaakko’s brain, he was trying to analyze the rhythmic structure of the knocking sounds that it made.

“Jaakko often complained about not being able to take a recording device with him to the MRI scans,” Maija recalls. Jaakko worked out a way to record the knocking sounds after all—he recorded them in his Symphony.

Pekka believes that there is also another hospital memory encoded into the Symphony. “Jaakko and I once talked about how the radiation therapy works,” explains Pekka. “When you have a tumor in your head that has to be irradiated, the device must be precisely focused. The focusing begins while the device is still quite far away and comes closer as the machine calculates the coordinates. It must not miss by even a fraction. I feel that Jaakko wrote out that moment at the beginning of the second movement. There’s a massive string pedal point that thins out and centers gradually on D.”

What about the orchestration: which instruments should play together and when, and in which key? First, Pekka drew a conductor’s-eye view of a large symphony orchestra on a huge

sheet of paper. Then he studied the orchestration in Jaakko’s concertos and the opera *Ice* and drew lines between the instrument sections according to what Jaakko must have been hearing at which point. As Pekka completed each section of music, Jari Eskola entered it on the computer and produced pages of finished score. There is not a single theme or melody in the completed Symphony that is not derived from Jaakko’s existing compositions.

It was obvious that Jaakko had customized the symphony for the American sound ideal, flexible and opulent—precisely the sort of thing that the Minnesota Orchestra is so good at. He wanted Osmo Vänskä to end his 20-year tenure as the Orchestra’s music director on a high.

There was a particular theme in the Symphony that recurred more often than any other. It appears on the piano at the very beginning so prominently that it must have been important for Jaakko. Pekka knew he had heard it before, but where? He could not find any hint of it in any other composition—concertos, operas, solo pieces or handwritten sketches. Yet he knew that it had been written by Jaakko and that it was familiar. Having exhausted all other possibilities, he played the theme for Maija on the chance that she could identify it.

Maija recognized it immediately. It is from a song which Jaakko had written for her much earlier and which was first performed at their wedding in summer 2019. It is titled *Haave* (Daydream).

A glimpse, of something
of which I knew nothing.
A weak and quiet daydream
beyond sleep...

The poem by Katja Sutela is of course about love, but by a happy coincidence the Finnish word *haave* (daydream) sounds similar to the Swedish word *havet* (the sea).

After months of work, Pekka and Jari succeeded in making Jaakko’s greatest dream come true. The Symphony clocks in at 20 minutes, consisting of two movements performed without a break. Pekka also provided a coda whose material harks back to Jaakko’s solo piano work *Jurmo*. Its title is the name of an island in the Turku archipelago, the region that is also the setting for the opera *Ice*. Perhaps the symphony was intended as an homage to the sea, Jaakko’s other great love?

“The rhythms in the coda are derived from the light signals flashed out by lighthouses, beacons and other navigation aids in the Gulf of Finland that are visible from a specific location,” explains Pekka. “Jaakko knew these waters well. This location is one where, following the lights, you emerge from the shelter of the islands and navigate out onto the open sea.”

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets (1 doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (1 doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, tamtam, wood block, xylophone, harp, piano (doubling celesta) and strings

Program note by Jaani Länsiö.