This program will last approximately two hours, which includes one intermission.
Paavo Järvi, Conductor
Alena Baeva, Violin
(New York Philharmonic debut)

TORMIS
(1930–2017)

Overture No. 2 (1958–59)

BRITTEN
(1913–76)

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra,
Moderato con moto
Vivace
Passacaglia
(played without pause)

ALENA BAEVA

Intermission

PROKOFIEV
(1891–1953)

Symphony No. 6 in E-flat minor, Op. 111
(1945–47)
Allegro moderato
Largo
Vivace

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Notes on the Program

Overture No. 2
Veljo Tormis

Veljo Tormis’s Overture No. 2 represents a double departure. Considered within the career of an Estonian composer whose prominence rests on his choral output, it is his lone orchestral work to have established a place in the concert repertoire. The 1959 overture also marks a historical inflection point, offering a glimpse of the thaw in prescriptive postwar Soviet cultural policy that viewed “anti-popular” symphonic music with a jaundiced eye.

Tormis was born in 1930 in the small town of Kuusalu, about 25 miles due east of Estonia’s capital city of Tallinn, and his path as a musician initially traced his father’s footsteps. A violinist, organist, choral conductor, and caretaker at a Lutheran church, Riho Tormis was a model for Veljo, whose “musical education was based mainly on what Father played on the violin and what his choirs sang.” This early immersion in choral music would leave a lifelong imprint. As a teenager, Veljo studied organ and composition in Tallinn, and it was at the Conservatory there that he first developed an interest in Estonian folk song. In 1951 Tormis enrolled at the Moscow Conservatory, though his organ studies were cut short when Soviet suspicion of the instrument’s association with the church eliminated the program, shifting his attention entirely toward composition.

Along with Latvia and Lithuania, Estonia is one of three bordering, seaside Baltic states that were buffeted by political turbulence before, during, and after World War II. Tormis was born in the middle of what Estonians nostalgically remember as “Independence time” (1920–40); he was nine years old when World War II broke out in Europe, and in his adolescence he witnessed his country caught in a geopolitical tug of war between Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany. At the onset of the war, Estonia declared its neutrality before being annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940, occupied by the Nazis in 1941, and being fully absorbed into the USSR from 1944 to 1991. These years utterly transformed Tormis’s home country, which was 97 percent ethnic Estonian in 1945 but eventually plummeted to just over 60 percent through war casualties, evacuation, deportation, and political execution.

A significant influence on Tormis’s career was the 1948 edict issued by Joseph Stalin’s presumptive successor Andrei Zhdanov proclaiming “Socialist realism” to be official Soviet cultural policy. Music historians have taken particular interest in the Zhdanov Decree because music was squarely in its crosshairs. Such

In Short

Born: August 7, 1930, in Kuusalu, Estonia
Died: January 21, 2017, in Tallinn, Estonia
Work composed: 1958–59
World Premiere: 1959, in Tallinn, by the Estonia Radio Symphony Orchestra, Roman Matsov, conductor
New York Philharmonic premiere: these performances
Estimated duration: ca. 11 minutes
The Work at a Glance

The clear tonal center, unchanging triple meter, avoidance of jarring dissonance, and lucid ABA structure of Tormis’s Overture No. 2 suggest a comparatively conservative work for its time. Yet the composer deploys these elements to produce character and color, tension and release, that bring the orchestra uniquely to life.

The adrenaline-filled opening section is driven by unison strings playing agitated 16th notes in perpetual motion that is somehow both static and searching. This music alternates with machine gun–like volleys on the snare drum punctuated by forceful, erratic stabs by the winds and upper strings. Trumpet blasts foreshadow things to come. The terse frontal assault of the opening minutes is finally relieved by a singing violin melody that leavens the bustling counterpoint of 16th notes. At the climax, shrieking flutes morph into sighing strings, and we suddenly reach a spacious oasis of relaxation.

In his second purely orchestral composition, Tormis seems to experiment with instrumental colors in the contrasting middle section marked piu tranquillo that features solos by the cello, flute, and clarinet; a French horn duet; and strikingly tender trios by violins and then violas that transport us to the world of chamber music. An abruptly dark retransition shaded by a chorus of the lowest woodwinds (clarinet, bass clarinet, bassoon, and contrabassoon) initiates the journey back, the 16th notes gradually reappearing to prepare us for the return of the volatile opening material. This time, more-prominent brass and military drumrolls ratchet up the sense of urgency — perhaps even the imminent doom of a march to the gallows — as Tormis closes dramatically with three final, stark shots across the bow.

Veljo Tormis
probably haven’t written so-called abso-
lute music for the sake of music,” Tormis
told an interviewer in 1990. “The con-
cept for even the frequently played Teine
Avamäng [Second Overture] lies some-
where other than in the music” — though
he never seemed to have revealed its extra-
musical inspiration. Tormis’s now-obscure
Overture No. 1, written in 1956 for his doss-
ier of thesis compositions at the Moscow
Conservatory, was his first work for orches-
tra. He composed his second, Overture
No. 2, shortly after graduation, when he
was 29 years old and teaching music the-
ory, composition, and Soviet music history
in Tallinn. This was not long after the death
of Stalin, in 1953, and Nikita Khrushchev’s
1956 “Secret Speech,” which revealed the
shocking excesses of the former Soviet
leader’s deadly purges. The Overture No. 2
thus appeared at a moment of Soviet reckoning that perhaps beckoned Tormis
to explore a new compositional palette in
one of just seven orchestral works that he
wrote in his six-decade-long career.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo,
two oboes, two clarinets and bass clari-
et, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four
horns, three trumpets, three trombones,
tuba, timpani, military drums (one “ordi-
nario” and one “scordato,” here performed
by snare drums), and strings.

— Mark Burford, R. P. Wollenberg
Professor of Music at Reed College and
author of Mahalia Jackson and the
Black Gospel Field, who writes about
African American popular music,
European concert music, and opera

Tormis’s Overture No. 2 is presented
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Inc., copyright owners.
Benjamin Britten reached young adulthood without the specter of war looming, but as he moved into his 20s European politics turned grim. On September 3, 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany, following the latter’s invasion of Poland. Britten had left England for America four months earlier with tenor Peter Pears, his artistic and romantic partner, and he would remain in the States until April 1942. A declared pacifist, Britten fully understood the hostility with which such a philosophical position would be received in wartime Britain, the more so when coming from a creative artist who was gay. When he did return to England a judge eventually ruled that instead of carrying out noncombatant war-related service, the greater national benefit lay in Britten’s continuing to work as a musician — which is precisely what he did, soon clinching a reputation as Great Britain’s finest composer since Henry Purcell two-and-a-half centuries earlier.

Even before the outbreak of World War II Britten’s anti-war sentiments had been sharpened by the viciousness of the Spanish Civil War, which some historians have viewed as a sort of dress rehearsal for the greater international conflict that followed. In 1936 Britten had traveled to perform at the ISCM (International Society of Contemporary Music) festival in Barcelona, where he appeared as pianist in his Suite, Op. 6, along with the Spanish violinist Antonio Brosa. At the same gathering he was overwhelmed by the experience of hearing the World Premiere of Alban Berg’s Violin Concerto, a “concerto-as-requiem” that seems to have inspired Britten to produce his own “big heavyweight” violin concerto (as he put it) with a similar memorial cast. The third movement of Britten’s concerto was accordingly conceived as a tribute to the British volunteer soldiers who had fallen battling the fascist forces in Spain — or so Brosa maintained.

By the time Britten’s Violin Concerto was premiered, by the New York Philharmonic in March 1940, the Spanish Civil War had ended, and World War II had begun (at least so far as Great Britain was concerned). The road to that premiere was circuitous. Then Music Director John Barbirolli had booked Brosa to perform Berg’s Violin Concerto, believing that the concert would represent that work’s New York premiere. He then learned that the Berg work had already been played in New York, in 1937, and the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Intent on presenting a New

In Short

Born: November 22, 1913, in Lowestoft, Suffolk, England

Died: December 4, 1976, in Aldeburgh, Suffolk

Work composed: from November 1938 through late September 1939, revised in 1950 and 1954, with the final version of the orchestral score (played here) appearing in 1965; dedicated to Henry Boys, one of the composer’s associates in the English Opera Group

World premiere: March 28, 1940, by the New York Philharmonic, John Barbirolli, conductor, Antonio Brosa, soloist

Most recent New York Philharmonic performance: July 19, 2019, Jaap van Zweden, conductor, Augustin Hadelich, soloist, at Colorado’s Bravo! Vail Music Festival

Estimated duration: ca. 31 minutes
York premiere, Barbirolli then turned to Nikolai Myaskovsky’s Violin Concerto, which had been unveiled in 1938 in Leningrad, but a sudden escalation of tension between the United States and the USSR rendered that choice impolitic. Brosa then suggested the Britten Concerto, and he played a read-through for Barbirolli in London in August 1939, accompanied at the piano. Barbirolli responded with enthusiasm and plans moved toward the work’s premiere.

Olin Downes, in The New York Times, noted:

there is modern deployment of percussion — perhaps too persistent employment of these devices, which involve not only effects of percussion, but rhythms that become organic parts of the musical development.

No doubt he was thinking especially of the opening measures, in which the timpani’s distant tattoo (in a Spanish rhythm, Brosa claimed) is embellished by soft strokes on the cymbal — a percussive opening to a violin concerto that no music aficionado could fail to connect to the drumbeats that launch Beethoven’s Violin Concerto.

In the Composer’s Words

Britten provided a program note for a performance of his Violin Concerto in 1971 at the Aldeburgh Festival:

The first movement starts with a tiny phrase for timpani, answered by the cymbal. This becomes the accompaniment for the first long tune on the violin solo, reappears many times during the movement, and finally accompanies a melodic cadenza descending slowly from the violin’s highest notes, in double- and triple-stopping.

There is a pleading middle section in the acrobatic Vivace, after which the previous material appears softly and muted. There is a slow crescendo to a tutti which introduces a cadenza. This leads directly to the Passacaglia, of which the theme is announced by the trombones.

The critic Louis Biancolli wrote in the New York World-Telegram:

Mr. Britten, a tall, gangling lad of 26, came out after the performance and bowed rather shyly and awkwardly. Frankly, he didn’t look like the composer of his D-minor concerto. But, then you never can tell in music.

— James M. Keller, former New York Philharmonic Program Annotator; San Francisco Symphony program annotator; and author of Chamber Music: A Listener’s Guide (Oxford University Press)

Instrumentation: three flutes (two doubling piccolo), two oboes (one doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, orchestra bells, triangle, snare drum, tenor drum, bass drum, whip, cymbals, harp, and strings, in addition to the solo violin.

Britten’s Violin Concerto is presented under license from Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., copyright owners.
Prokofiev composed his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies near the conclusion of World War II, and they were premiered within nine months of each other, in January and October 1947. More than a decade and a half had elapsed since the premieres of his Symphonies Nos. 3 and 4, unveiled respectively in 1929 and 1930, and in the interstice Prokofiev’s life had changed greatly. In May 1918 he had left Revolution-torn Russia and ended up spending the first half of his career abroad, in New York until 1922, and in the heady avant-garde climate of Paris from 1922 to 1936. But the pull of his native land grew strong, and he decided to return definitively to Moscow in 1936.

That was precisely when Soviet musical life was becoming consolidated under the iron-fisted, isolating auspices of the Union of Soviet Composers. Prokofiev weathered the challenge reasonably well; in fact, like many Soviet artists, he actually spread his creative wings somewhat during the World War II years, when Soviet authorities were occupied with more pressing matters than crushing experimentation in the arts. The resounding success of Prokofiev’s Fifth Symphony in 1945 sent the composer’s stock soaring, and he bolstered his standing by producing a number of overtly patriotic pieces of the sort that were guaranteed to win approbation from the authorities.

Still, there was reason for a composer to be apprehensive. In February 1946 Stalin declared in a speech that cultural policy would again become a priority. In August and September his cultural deputy, Andrei Zhdanov, promulgated stern directives regarding literature, theater, and film, leveling vehement personal and professional attacks against figures such as the poet Anna Akhmatova and the film director Sergei Eisenstein. Prokofiev had previously collaborated on artistic ventures with both.

Prokofiev jotted the first sketches for his Sixth Symphony in 1944, but carried out principal work on the piece between 1945 and February 1947. The flow was interrupted by several other projects, including such “obligatory” items as his Ode to the End of the War, nationalistic additions to his opera War and Peace, and two works celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution: the Festive Poem (Thirty Years) for Orchestra and the cantata Flourish, Mighty Homeland.

The premiere of the Sixth Symphony, in

In Short

Born: April 23, 1891 (according to the composer, though some recent scholarship indicates April 27), in Sontsovka, in the Ekaterinoslav district of Ukraine

Died: March 5, 1953, in Moscow, Russia

Work composed: 1945–47, completed in piano score by late February 1947 and orchestrated by that fall

World premiere: October 11, 1947, in the Great Hall of the Leningrad Conservatory, with Evgeny Mravinsky conducting the Leningrad Philharmonic

New York Philharmonic premiere: November 24, 1949, Leopold Stokowski, conductor


Estimated duration: ca. 44 minutes
Leningrad in October 1947, was a critical success. Grigori Schneerson set the stage when he penned the original program note:

It is one of the most beautiful, most exalted of his works, imbued with the creative spirit of Soviet humanism. ... It is a great landmark not only in the art of Prokofiev, but in the whole history of the Soviet symphony. ... This great work shows once again how immeasurably superior Soviet music is to the music of the capitalist West, where symphonism has long ceased to be an art of lofty ideas and high emotionalism, and is now in a state of profound decadence and degeneration.

In November 1947 Prokofiev was named People’s Artist of the Russian Republic, and then, in January 1948 — disaster. Zhdanov convened the Conference of Musicians at the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party, and suddenly composers came up for the sort of denunciation that had already befallen their colleagues in other fields. Prokofiev’s Sixth Symphony was among the works censured for being “marked with formalist perversions ... alien to the

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**Politics and Music**

In the political minefield surrounding his Sixth Symphony, Prokofiev spoke succinctly and carefully. Here’s his encapsulation of the piece:

The first movement is of a restless nature, at times lyrical and at times stern; the second movement is more tranquil and songful; the finale, fast and buoyant, would resemble in nature my Fifth Symphony but for the stern echoes of the first movement.

In the October 30, 1947, edition of the newspaper *Vechernyaya Moskva* — which is to say after the successful Leningrad premiere and before the work’s rather cooler reception in Moscow in December — Prokofiev tried to shore up opinion by underscoring a political interpretation:

While working on the Sixth Symphony I strove to express in the music my admiration for the strength of the human spirit which so vividly manifests itself in our time, in our country.

And in his preface to the published score he observed:

The Sixth Symphony is a monumental work inspired by the fateful events of the Great Patriotic War and full of reflections on past experiences.
It instantly disappeared from Soviet concert halls, not to return until the 1960s, after it had already gained international acclaim. Israel Nestyev’s assessment, in his officially sanctioned 1957 Prokofiev biography, reflects the only possible public opinion at that time:

It seems as though the two Prokofievs, the old and the new, were engaged in a struggle, revealing in the course of this struggle both powerful, genuine lyricism and sudden outbursts of unrestrained expressionism utterly incomprehensible to the listener.

In the decades since, the Sixth Symphony has been embraced as a fully worthy successor to the Fifth.

**Instrumentation:** two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets plus E-flat clarinet and bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, tambourine, snare drum, woodblock, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, harp, piano doubling celesta, and strings.

— J.M.K.

**At the Time**

When Sergei Prokofiev was composing his Sixth Symphony, in 1945–47, the following events were taking place:

**1945**
- British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin meet at the Yalta Conference (right) to discuss the post–World War II reorganization of Europe.
- In Germany, Adolf Hitler commits suicide.
- In Russia, Prokofiev’s ballet *Cinderella*, starring ballerina Galina Ulanova, is premiered at Moscow’s Bolshoi Theatre.

**1946**
- In Japan, women vote for the first time.
- The first session of the United Nations was convened in the Methodist Central Hall in London.

**1947**
- The Catalan cellist Pablo Casals vows not to play in public as long as Spanish dictator Franco is in power.
- In the US, Tennessee Williams’s play *A Streetcar Named Desire* (right) wins the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.
- The Dead Sea Scrolls are discovered in Wadi Qumran.

— The Editors
New York Philharmonic

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The New York Philharmonic uses the revolving seating method for section string players who are listed alphabetically in the roster.

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The Artists

Estonian Grammy Award–winning conductor Paavo Järvi, widely recognized as one of today’s most eminent conductors, enjoys close partnerships with the finest orchestras around the world. He serves as chief conductor of Zurich’s Tonhalle Orchestra, artistic director of The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen since 2004, and both founder and artistic director of the Estonian Festival Orchestra.

Järvi opened his fifth season with Zurich’s Tonhalle Orchestra with a continuation of his Bruckner cycle in the recently restored, iconic Tonhalle. Additional highlights in the 2023–24 season include the beginning of a Mahler cycle and a major tour of South Korea and Japan.

The year 2024 celebrates the 20th anniversary of Järvi’s tenure as artistic director of The Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, the ensemble with which he has performed and recorded benchmark performances of the complete orchestral works of Beethoven, Robert Schumann, and Brahms. With their most recent project, dedicated to Haydn’s London Symphonies, they play in residency at the Vienna Konzerthaus and on tour throughout Germany before embarking on a new in-depth focus on Schubert symphonies.

Paavo Järvi concludes each season with performances and conducting masterclasses at the Pärnu Music Festival in Estonia, which he founded in 2011. The success of both the Festival and its resident ensemble — the Estonian Festival Orchestra — has led to a string of tours and CDs.

In addition to his orchestral and festival positions, Järvi is in demand as a guest conductor, regularly appearing with the Berlin Philharmonic, Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and London Philharmonia, as well as the New York Philharmonic. This season he also conducts the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Philadelphia Orchestra, London Philharmonic Orchestra, Orchestra dell’Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Budapest Festival Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, and Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra.

As a dedicated supporter of Estonian culture, Paavo Järvi was awarded the Order of the White Star by the President of Estonia in 2013. Other honors and prizes include a Grammy Award for his recording of Sibelius’s Cantatas, being named Opus Klassik Conductor of the Year (2019), Rheingau Music Prize (2019), and Gramophone Artist of the Year (2015). He has been named Commandeur de L’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture and received both the Sibelius Medal and Hindemith Prize.

Violinist Alena Baeva is one of the most exciting, versatile, and alluring soloists on the world stage today. She is a regular presence on the stages of Europe and Asia, and makes a series of major North American debuts this season.

She enjoys a strong artistic partnership with conductor Paavo Järvi, with whom she makes her New York Philharmonic debut, and performs across
Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, and Switzerland. An exclusive Alpha Classics artist, in 2024 Baeva will release a fairy-tale-themed sonata disc — her first project for the label — in which she partners with celebrated Ukrainian pianist Vadym Kholodenko (2013 Van Cliburn Gold Medallist).

Thanks to her extraordinary facility for the assimilation of music coupled with passionate artistic curiosity, Baeva holds a vast and rapidly expanding repertoire of more than 50 violin concertos, including many lesser-known works of the violin literature. She performs chamber music with noted collaborators including Martha Argerich, Daishin Kashimoto, Misha Maisky, and Lawrence Power.

Baeva is a citizen of Luxembourg, her home since 2010. In her early years, she fled civil war in her hometown of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, and her family settled in Kazakhstan, where she began violin studies at age five with Olga Danilova. At age ten she was invited to study in Moscow with Eduard Grach, receiving additional coaching from Mstislav Rostropovich, Boris Garlitsky, Seiji Ozawa, and Shlomo Mintz. She won multiple major competitions, including the prestigious International Henryk Wieniawski Competition when she was 16 years old.

Alena Baeva plays the “ex-William Kroll” Guarneri del Gesù of 1738, on generous loan from an anonymous patron, with the assistance of J&A Beares.
Jaap van Zweden became Music Director of the New York Philharmonic in 2018. In 2023–24, his farewell season celebrates his connection with the Orchestra’s musicians as he leads performances in which six Principal players appear as concerto soloists. He also revisits composers he has championed at the Philharmonic, from Steve Reich and Joel Thompson to Mozart and Mahler. He is also Music Director of the Hong Kong Philharmonic, since 2012, and becomes Music Director of the Seoul Philharmonic in 2024. He has appeared as guest with the Orchestre de Paris; Amsterdam’s Royal Concertgebouw and Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestras; Vienna, Berlin, and Los Angeles philharmonic orchestras; and London Symphony, Chicago Symphony, and Cleveland orchestras.

Jaap van Zweden’s NY Phil recordings include David Lang’s prisoner of the state and Julia Wolfe’s Grammy-nominated Fire in my mouth (Decca Gold). He conducted the first performances in Hong Kong of Wagner’s Ring Cycle, the Naxos recording of which led the Hong Kong Philharmonic to be named the 2019 Gramophone Orchestra of the year. His performance of Wagner’s Parsifal received the Edison Award for Best Opera Recording in 2012.

Born in Amsterdam, Jaap van Zweden became the youngest-ever concertmaster of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra at age 19 and began his conducting career almost 20 years later. He was named Musical America’s 2012 Conductor of the Year, was profiled by CBS 60 Minutes on arriving at the NY Phil, and in the spring of 2023 received the prestigious Concertgebouw Prize. In 1997 he and his wife, Aaltje, established the Papageno Foundation to support families of children with autism.

The New York Philharmonic connects with millions of music lovers each season through live concerts in New York and around the world, broadcasts, streaming, education programs, and more. In the 2023–24 season — which builds on the Orchestra’s transformation reflected in the new David Geffen Hall — the NY Phil honors Jaap van Zweden in his farewell season as Music Director, premieres 14 works by a wide range of composers including some whom van Zweden has championed, marks György Ligeti’s centennial, and celebrates the 100th birthday of the beloved Young People’s Concerts.

The Philharmonic has commissioned and/or premiered important works, from Dvořák’s New World Symphony to Tania León’s Pulitzer Prize–winning Stride. The NY Phil has released more than 2,000 recordings since 1917, and in 2023 announced a partnership with Apple Music Classical, the new streaming app designed to deliver classical music lovers the optimal listening experience. The Orchestra builds on a longstanding commitment to serving its communities — which has led to annual free concerts across New York City and the free online New York Philharmonic Shelby White & Leon Levy Digital Archives — through a new ticket access program.

Founded in 1842, the New York Philharmonic is the oldest symphony orchestra in the United States, and one of the oldest in the world. Jaap van Zweden became Music Director in 2018–19, following titans including Bernstein, Toscanini, and Mahler. Gustavo Dudamel will become Music and Artistic Director beginning in 2026 after serving as Music Director Designate in 2025–26.
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