

Beethoven's Ninth

Friday, June 1 – 7:30 pm

Saturday, June 2 – 8 pm

Alexander Prior, conductor

Anu Komsj, soprano

Pascale Spinney, mezzo-soprano

tba, tenor

tba, bass

Kokopelli & Òran, choirs (Scott Leithead & Kathleen Luyk, Music Directors)

Afterthoughts, Friday post-performance in the Main Lobby with Alexander Prior & tba

Symphony Prelude, Saturday 7 pm in the Upper Circle (Third Level) Lobby with Larissa Agosti

SIBELIUS

Tulen synty ("The Origin of Fire"), **Op.32**

(9')*

SIBELIUS

Luonnotar ("The Nature Spirit"), **Op.70**

(10')*

SIBELIUS

Oma maa ("Our Native Land"), **Op.92**

(12')*

Allegramente

Adagio assai

Presto

INTERMISSION (20 minutes)

BEETHOVEN

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op.125 "Choral"

(31')*

Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso

Molto vivace

Adagio molto e cantabile

Presto – Allegro assai

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

Vocal works by Jean Sibelius

(b. Tavestehus, 1865 / d. Järvenpää, 1957)

Inextricably bound up with many of the important works of Jean Sibelius is the *Kalevala*, a collection of epic poetry assembled in the 19th century and based on the oral folklore and legends of Finland and Karelia. Its place as the foremost work in Finnish literature is, itself, inextricably bound to the part it played in delineating a true Finnish national identity – a unifying force in Finland’s struggle to win independence from Russian rule. And as the leading figure in Finnish music, Jean Sibelius turned often to the *Kalevala* as a wellspring.

Tulen synty (“The Origin of Fire”), **Op.32** is a cantata written for the opening of the National Theatre in Helsinki. It premiered on April 9, 1902, scored for bass soloist and men’s chorus – at the premiere, the choir numbered over 350! The story is from the same part of the *Kalevala* that would also yield Sibelius’ work *Pohjola’s Daughter*, and tells of the land of Kalevala plunged into darkness because the Mistress of Pohjola has captured the sun and the moon and stolen fire from Kalevala’s homes. Ukko, chief of the gods, searches for them in vain. The second part is faster and has the story taken up by the choir. In this Ukko creates new fire and entrusts it to the Maiden of the Air. In his biography of Sibelius, Andrew Barnett stresses that Finland, indeed, would consider itself to have been plunged into darkness under the yoke of Russia, so seeking the light of freedom is an obvious allegory. Eight years after the work’s first performance, Sibelius revised the score, making the solo bass part more cohesive, and smoothing the entry of the choir from the solo first part.

Luonnotar (“Nature Spirit”), **Op.70**, dates from 1913, and is a creation story from the *Kalevala*. Sibelius originally had an operatic treatment in mind, but changed the work to a tone poem for soprano and orchestra, dedicating it to the work’s first soloist, Aino Ackté. Luonnotar herself is the Mother of the Seas, and creates the sky, including the moon and the stars, from the shell of an egg. The soprano part is extremely challenging, with a range of over two octaves and demanding some daunting top notes. The work itself is more or less in two parts: shimmering strings dominate the ethereal opening; the entire orchestra rises with the swell of the story’s rise to the heavens as the sky is created. The work premiered at the Three Choirs Festival in Gloucester, England, on September 10, 1913.

Finland declared its independence from Russia in 1917. ***Oma maa*** (“Our Native Land”), **Op.92** was ostensibly written for the tenth anniversary of the National Chorus, though its timing and its subject certainly lend it an added significance. It was first performed on October 25, 1918 in Helsinki. Sibelius chose the text himself – a 19th-century poem by Samuel Gustaf Bergh (who wrote under the pen name Kallio). At the time of its composition, Sibelius and his family had been forced to flee their home, and were staying with friends, who sheltered them in a mental hospital in Helsinki. Food was scarce, life was hard, yet the resulting cantata for chorus and orchestra is among his most optimistic and affirming works.

Symphony No. 9 in D minor, Op.125 "Choral"

Ludwig van Beethoven

(b. Bonn, 1770 / d. Vienna, 1827)

First performance: May 7, 1824 in Vienna

Last ESO performance: January 2010

“The last symphony of Beethoven is the redemption of music from out of her peculiar element into the realm of universal art. It is the human evangel of the art of the future. Beyond it no further step is possible, for upon it the perfect art work of the future alone can follow: the universal drama for which Beethoven forged the key.”

Richard Wagner

Friedrich Schiller’s poem *An die Freude* (“To Joy”) was, for Beethoven, the very summation of his own personal feelings towards brotherhood and humankind. Throughout almost all of his adult life, his sketchbooks show that he periodically reminded himself that he was determined to set it to music. In 1822, while immersed in the writing of the *Missa solemnis*, Beethoven secured a commission from the Philharmonic Society of London for a symphony. He originally intended to compose one with a strictly instrumental final movement, feeling that what he called his “German Symphony,” with a choral ending set to Schiller’s words, would be unsuitable for an English audience. Yet the two projects eventually merged.

The *Ninth Symphony* begins with a principal theme of unmitigated power, announced after an opening 16 bars of exquisite mystery. This main theme is given a development section of passion rare even for the passionate Beethoven. The second movement is the work’s Scherzo – another unusual aspect of this work, as it was customary to have a slow second movement, then the Scherzo third. The main theme of the Scherzo is a jaunty one given a fugue-like presentation, with a dominant part for the timpani.

The beautiful Adagio third movement is a long, hymnlike song of repose, balancing between the jovial second movement, and the gathering might to come in the finale. The fourth movement begins with a loud dissonance, a frantic rush, then measured restatements of the principal themes of each of the preceding movements. There is another loud chord, followed by that most famous theme, which we know as the *Ode to Joy*. But it begins in a barely-heard whisper on the cellos, then restated by more instruments, then more, until it is grandly stated by the tutti. The dissonance of the opening returns, halted by a lone voice, which calls out, “O Freunde, nicht diese Töne! Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen” (O friends, no more these sounds! Let us sing more cheerful songs).

At times mysterious, at other times unrestrainedly happy, other times angelic, or reverent, or powerful, the words of Schiller’s poem are treated at every turn by Beethoven with exacting care and astute judgement – the final response of a man who first noted down ideas for this 1822 work as far back as 1793. The *Ninth Symphony* stands as one of music’s great endings, and great beginnings. An ending

because not only was it the final symphony Beethoven wrote, it was the last symphony he could have written, completing as it did his long-held ambition. A beginning because from the moment the work was first heard, it was the yardstick by which all symphonies, particularly those by German composers, would be judged.

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