

The Sibelius of Song and Dance

Thursday, February 28 – 8 pm

Alexander Prior, conductor

Ragnhild Hemsing, violin

Whitney Leigh Sloan, soprano

all music by **Jean SIBELIUS** unless otherwise indicated

<i>Karelia Suite, Op.11</i>	(17')*
Intermezzo	
Ballade	
Alla marcia	
<i>Violin Concerto in D minor, Op.47: 1st mvmt – Allegro moderato</i>	(16')*
<i>Kuolema, Op.44</i>	(13')*
Valse triste	
Scene with Cranes	
INTERMISSION (20 minutes)	
“Illalle” (“To Evening”), Op.17 No. 6	(2')*
“Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings mote” (“The girl returned from meeting her lover”), Op.37 No. 5	(4')*
“Svarta rosor” (“Black Roses”), Op.36 No. 1	(2')*
“Se’n har jag ej frågat mera” (“Then I questioned no further”), Op.17 No. 1	(3')*
trad.	
Folk tune	(5')*
<i>Suite for Violin and Strings, Op.117</i>	(9')*
Country Scenery	
Evening in Spring	
In the Summer	

program subject to change

*indicates approximate performance duration

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In 1892, up and coming composer Jean Sibelius received a scholarship to study runic song in the Karelia region of Finland. Around this time, Finland was still under the oppressive rule of tsarist Russia, and the Finns resisted Russia's efforts to stifle their history and culture. Karelia was a region where ancient folk traditions had been preserved, and "Karelianism," a movement that promoted the cultural heritage of that region, became a force to be reckoned with in response to Russia's heavy hand.

Sibelius was on the radar of the Finnish cultural movement, but was not, at this time, its leading light. Nevertheless, he was known well enough that, in the spring of 1893, he was commissioned by the Viipuri Student Association at Helsinki University to compose the music for what was called a pageant celebrating Karelian culture, but was in fact a nationalist rally, held on November 13, 1893. As such, it was a rousing success. As for the music Sibelius composed, he complained to friends that the cheering and clapping of the audience made the music all but impossible to hear. Unsatisfied, as he often was, with the complete score, Sibelius extracted three movements into the **Karelia Suite**, which has proven to be one of his most popular orchestral scores.

A complete program note for Sibelius' **Violin Concerto** can be found on page _.

Kuolema ("Death") is a symbolist drama by the Finnish playwright Arvid Järnefelt, who happened to be Jean Sibelius' brother in law. Sibelius wrote incidental music for theatrical productions throughout his career, and composed eight separate pieces, for string orchestra, to be used throughout the play, which premiered on December 2, 1903.

In the play's first scene, the central character Paavali sits near the bedside of his dying mother. She tells him she has had a dream in which she has gone to a grand ball. She falls asleep with this happy thought, her son dozing nearby. Death appears to claim her, but in her semi-conscious state, she mistakes the grim visage for her long-dead husband, and she rises to dance with him. The music for this scene has become known as the **Valse triste** ("Sad Waltz"), and this tender, yet haunting melody has become one of Sibelius' best-known works. The strings orchestra of the original version were augmented later by Sibelius by a flute, a clarinet, two horns, and a harp.

In Act II, a witch has given Paavali a ring which has the power to reveal to him his future bride. The scene changes at once to a forest in summer, where Elsa, a young woman, sings to herself, and Paavali meets

her. After sleeping beside each other, Paavali wakes to resume his travels, but Elsa wants him to remain. A flock of cranes flies overhead at that point, one of which breaks off from the flock and swoops down, carrying an infant to them. The music accompanying this scene is tonight's other excerpt from Sibelius' score.

Jean Sibelius is known outside his homeland for his orchestral scores, in particular his symphonies (our Sibelius festival, in fact, features three of his symphonies). But he wrote many works for voice, both choral and solo voice. Tonight, we present four of his songs originally for soprano and piano, in orchestrations by several composers, including Edmonton composer (and the ESO's first-ever Composer in Residence) John Estacio.

In the autumn of 1898, Sibelius wrote music to a sonnet newly written by Finnish poet A.V. Forsman. "**Illale**" was eventually published as the sixth song of a set, Op.17. The title can have a double meaning in Finnish – the poet's wife was named Ilta, and so the title could be understood as "To Evening," which is how it has become known, or "To Ilta." Sibelius' setting is a set of variations on a single phrase.

In January of 1901, just before leaving Berlin after a visit, Sibelius wrote "**Flickan kom ifrån sin älsklings mote**," which has won popularity outside his homeland few other songs have. Its title translates directly as "The girl returned from meeting her lover," but has also been published as "The Tryst." The setting of the Nino Runeberg poem is passionate and sweetly melodic, while the words tell of a young woman, who has concealed the meetings she has had with her lover from her mother, finally confesses all when he proves unfaithful.

Perhaps his most often-performed song, "**Svarta rosor**" ("Black Roses") was sketched out in April of 1899 and complete a few months later. "The song's appeal to singers and audiences alike is easy to understand," writes Andrew Barnett in his excellent biography, *Sibelius*. "Although its proportions are compact, it has a broadly arching vocal line and a climax full of operatic intensity." The words are by Swedish poet Ernst Josephson, in which a rose tree in the human heart symbolically grows thorns which are a constant source of torment.

Published in the same set as "Illale," comes the song "**Se'n har jag ej frågat mera**" ("Then I questioned no further"), another Nino Runeberg poem. No less than the dyspeptic Johannes Brahms expressed his approval of the song. Upon hearing it sung for him in 1895, Brahms is reported to have kissed the singer on the forehead, asking her, when she returned to Vienna, to sing more Sibelius to him.

In the spring of 1929, on the cusp of putting down his compositional pen for good, Sibelius received word from his American publisher Carl Fischer, who nudged Sibelius to compose some works in very specific genres, which Fischer felt would be commercially successful. Specifically, solo piano works, songs for voice and piano, and string orchestra pieces, perhaps with voice or solo violin. Sibelius responded favorably to the idea, and among the pieces he wrote at Fischer's suggestion was the ***Suite for Violin and Strings***.

The three movements of the suite all have titles in English, as they were written for the American market, so to speak. Crushingingly, Fischer's publishing company ended up turning down all the works Sibelius submitted, with the oddly phrased refusal which stated in part, "...in view of the extremely unfortunate constellation in the music publishing field in the United States," they felt the music could not be published at that time. It was certainly their loss, as Sibelius' suite is charming, rife with folk idioms, and a wonderfully virtuosic *moto perpetuo* for the soloist in the final movement.

In 1899, the yoke of Russian oppression lay heavy on the people of Finland. Many avenues of expression of Finnish patriotism were violently put down, and when several writers courageously demonstrated to speak out against Russian rule, a pageant was staged in their honour. As Finland's leading composer of the day, Sibelius was asked to compose the music for the pageant. Its highlight was a work originally called *Finland Awakes*, though it has become known to us by the shortened name Sibelius later gave it – ***Finlandia***.

This rousing anthem became not only a rallying call for the Finns, but a heroic anthem for people the world over. But perhaps the greatest testament to the work was found in Russia itself. For years, even after the work was allowed to be played in Russia, it was given the title *Intermezzo*, not *Finlandia*. Its ability to stir the hearts of the Finns against the Russians stung a little too deeply, perhaps.

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