

Programme Notes

Saraste conducts Shostakovich

Fri 9 December 2022 · 20.15
Sun 11 December 2022 · 14.15

Jukka-Pekka Saraste - Conductor

Born: Heinola, Finland

Current position: Honorary Conductor Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, Honorary Conductor Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra; founder and Artistic Advisor Finnish Chamber Orchestra; Music Director Designate Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra (starting 2023)

Previously: Principal Conductor WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra

Education: Sibelius Academy Helsinki, conducting with Jorma Panula

Awards: Pro Finlandia Prize, Sibelius Medal, Finnish State Prize for Music

Guest Appearances: London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Gewandhausorchester Leipzig, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony, Staatskapelle Dresden, Cleveland Orchestra, symphony orchestras of Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, New York Philharmonic Orchestra

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 1990



Photo: Felix Broede

Christoffer Sundqvist - Clarinet

Born: Stockholm, Sweden

Education: Jakobstad Conservatory with Bernhard Nylund, Sibelius Academy Helsinki with Anna-Majja Korsima, Basel Music Academy with François Benda

Awards: Pro Musica Medal 1998, laureate Crusell Clarinet Competition 2002

Subsequently: principal clarinet of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, teacher at the Sibelius Academy; solo appearances with all major Finnish orchestras, BBC Symphony, Gothenburg Symphony, Estonian National Symphony, with conductors such as Okko Kamu, Hannu Lintu, Sakari Oramo, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and John Storgårds; chamber music with Angela Hewitt, Pekka Kuusisto, Thorleif Thedeen, the Plus Ensemble and wind quintet Arktinen Hysteria

Specialty: contemporary Nordic music; composers like Magnus Lindberg, Erkki-Sven Tüür, Aulis Sallinen and Sebastian Fagerlund wrote works for him

Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic: 2022



Photo: Linda Tallroth-Paananen

A close-up portrait of Lotta Wennäkoski, a woman with light brown hair and blue eyes, smiling slightly. She is wearing a white top. The background is a plain, light color.

PROGRAMME

conductor **Jukka-Pekka Saraste**
clarinet **Christoffer Sundqvist**

Lotta Wennäkoski (1970)
Flounce (2017; Dutch première)

Carl Nielsen (1865-1931)
Clarinet Concerto, op. 57 (1928)

intermission

Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975)
Symphony No. 8 in C minor, op. 65
(1943)

- Adagio - Allegro non troppo -
Adagio
- Allegretto
- Allegro non troppo
- Largo
- Allegretto

Concert ends at around 22.25 / 16.25

**Most recent performances by our
orchestra:**

*Wennäkoski Flounce: first
performance*

*Nielsen Clarinet Concerto: Mar 2015,
clarinet Martin Fröst, conductor*

Thomas Søndergård

*Shostakovich Symphony No. 8: Oct
2019, conductor Gianandrea Noseda*

*Cover: Photo Slobodan Junior
Anđelković*

Lotta Wennäkoski, photo Mikko Rikala



Light and darkness

You could describe the journey of this programme as a slow dimming of the lights. Following Lotta Wennäkoski's glittering world, the shadows begin to take over: Shostakovich's Eighth Symphony is a dark work where at its most optimistic the only light is the glow of a fake sun. In between these works, Nielsen's Clarinet Concerto switches between despondency and exuberance.

Within a small Finish population there is a striking presence of musical talent, an unbroken line stretching back to Jean Sibelius. Some claim Lotta Wennäkoski to be the rightful heir to the now almost legendary Kaija Saariaho, her most important composition teacher. She also studied in the Netherlands under Louis Andriessen. Such a varied background has produced some striking pieces. Wennäkoski's work is at the same time poetic and forceful, often characterised by vibrant sound colours and effects.

With her work *Flounce*, composed in 2017 for the BBC Proms, she made her international breakthrough. The title characterises the music: Wennäkoski was fascinated by the different meanings of the word

'flounce' – both a way of moving around in an exaggeratedly impatient or angry manner, and a wide fringe of cloth sewn around the bottom of a dress or upholstery. The piece is therefore full of abrupt gestures, interspersed with decorative motifs and snatches of melody. There are no pauses for rest; everything is about light, lightness and movement, as though Wennäkoski were trying to defy gravity.

Screeching tram wheels

Nielsen's *Clarinet Concerto* also contains passages of bright flashes, but here they are framed by darkness. By the time he wrote this piece, he was no longer the energetic optimist of old. Bouts of frustration and depression had taken their toll. Carl Nielsen had made his

name with a style that – just as with his inspiration Johannes Brahms – balances classical detachment and a heart-on-sleeve romanticism. He hadn't aimed to force emotions on his audience, but over time all the turbulence of his life began to seep into his music. Aged around sixty, facing financial worries, problems in his marriage, and disappointment with the slow pace of winning international acclaim, he fell into a deep despondency. It was during this crisis that he wrote his *Clarinet Concerto* – a work that far from being as cold as ash, instead burst full of nervous, sometimes grim, energy. 'The clarinet,' the composer wrote, 'can be warm-hearted and hysterical at the same time, gentle as balm and screeching like a tram on badly greased rails.' Exactly the extremes that you expect from music from the 1920s, serving to camouflage Nielsen's roots in late-romanticism. Another modern feature is the driving beat of a snare drum. At that time the instrument gained popularity through jazz music, but here it has a mostly martial character. Interestingly, these mood swings were made with the intended soloist Aage Oxenvad in mind; a musician who suffered from a bipolar disorder.

Triumphant music?

The *Eighth Symphony* of Dmitri Shostakovich begins with the growl of the lower string section, followed by an ice-cold lament. You are immediately warned: this is no party. Shostakovich is certainly no eager-to-please composer. Throughout his fifteen symphonies you hear his continuing struggles with the Soviet regime. About his exact relationship with this regime there has been much speculation.

Some regard him as a secret dissident; others label him an opportunist. It's true that he accepted commissions by the Party to compose paeans to Stalin and anthems to socialism – but only when there was no way out. What matters is that he was continuously striking a balance between artistic self-expression and the restrictions that shackled

Everything is about light, lightness and movement, as though Wennäkoski were trying to defy gravity.

him. For certain he valued music – and thus the freedom of the spirit – above the dictates of the state, and this caused him permanent mental turmoil. The *Eighth Symphony*, composed during wartime in the summer of 1943, never gained the popularity of his *Seventh* ('Leningrad') with its menacing march theme. Nevertheless, it remains one of the composer's most dramatic and expressive works. He knew in advance that the piece would fall foul of the Union of Russian Composers, the vast organisation that exerted control over the output of Soviet composers. The Union had every expectation of a triumphant work, given that the previous winter the Red Army had defeated the Nazis at Stalingrad. A victory that needed to be set to music.

Mortal fear

At work on this *Eighth Symphony*, Shostakovich described the new work with a platitudinous mission statement: 'The *Eighth Symphony* reflects my thoughts, feelings and elevated creative mood, which could not help being influenced by the joyful news of the Red Army's victories. It is an attempt to look into the future, to the post-war era.

(...) All that is dark and gloomy will perish, and beauty will triumph.' It soon became clear: these words were dripping with irony. This is a symphonic work full of mortal fear, interspersed with satanic dances. The final movement ends as desolately as the first movement begins; the anticipated heroic themes are nowhere to be heard.

Jubilation was not justified, thought Shostakovich. At the back of his mind he pictured not just the horrors of war, but the state terror that had held his country in its grip for many years. What actually preoccupied Shostakovich can be deduced from his correspondence with friends: victory over Germany, he feared, would give Stalin *carte blanche* to further abuse his power in his own country. He was right. Following the work's premiere, conducted by Shostakovich acolyte Yevgeny Mravinsky, no other Russian orchestra was willing to add the work to its repertoire. In 1956 the composer looked back with bitterness at the work's reception: 'I very much regret that for many years now we have not been playing the *Eighth Symphony*, in which I have put much thought and emotion. It was an attempt to express the feelings of the people, to reflect the terrible tragedy of war.' What he did not say, was that he feared being silenced as a response to the symphony.

Michiel Cleij

Agenda

Fri 16 December 2022 • 20.15

Sun 18 December 2022 • 14.15

conductor **Jan Willem de Vriend**
soprano **Lucy Crowe**
tenor **Mauro Peter**
baritone **Christopher Purves**
choir **Laurens Symfonisch**
Haydn Die Schöpfung

Thu 22 December 2022 • 20.15

Fri 23 December 2022 • 20.15

conductor **Yannick Nézet-Séguin**
choir **Nationaal Kinderkoor**
Tchaikovsky The Nutcracker

Sun 8 January 2023 • 10.30

Music for Breakfast No. 2
with **Ron Tjihuis** (Cor Anglais), **Carla Schrijner** (Cello), and colleagues
from the orchestra
Chamber Music by **M. Haydn**,
Broemel, **Françaix** and **Vaughan Williams**

Thu 12 January 2023 • 20.15

Fri 13 January 2023 • 20.15

Sun 15 January 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Lahav Shani**
piano **Daniil Trifonov**
Beethoven Piano Concerto no. 1
Strauss Ein Heldenleben

Sun 12 February 2023 • 10.30

Music for Breakfast No. 3
with **Charlotte Sprenkels** (Harp),
Veronika Lénártová (Viola), and
colleagues from the orchestra
Chamber Music by **Mozart**,
Takemitsu, **Ibert** and **Debussy**

Thu 24 February 2023 • 20.15

Sun 26 February 2023 • 14.15

conductor **Lahav Shani**
mezzosoprano (Judith) **Claudia Mahnke**
baritone (Bluebeard) **Johannes Martin Kränzle**
Ligeti Atmosphères
Bartók Duke Bluebeard's Castle

Musicians

Chief Conductor

Lahav Shani

Honorary Conductor

Yannick Nézet-Séguin

Principal Assistant Conductor

Bertie Baigent

First Violin

Igor Gruppman,
leader
Marieke Blankestijn,
leader
Quirine Scheffers
Hed Yaron Meyerson
Saskia Otto
Arno Bons
Mireille van der Wart
Cor van der Linden
Rachel Browne
Maria Dingjan
Marie-José Schrijner
Noëmi Bodden
Petra Visser
Sophia Torrenga
Hadewijch Hofland
Annerien Stuker
Alexandra van
Beveren
Koen Stapert

Second Violin

Charlotte Potgieter
Cecilia Ziano
Frank de Groot
Laurens van Vliet
Tomoko Hara
Elina Staphorsius
Jun Yi Dou
Bob Bruyn
Letizia Sciarone
Eefje Habraken
Maija Reinikainen
Wim Ruitenbeek
Babette van den Berg
Melanie Broers

Viola

Anne Huser
Roman Spitzer
Galahad Samson
Kerstin Bonk
Lex Prummel
Janine Baller
Francis Saunders
Veronika Lénártová
Rosalinde Kluck
León van den Berg
Olfje van der Klein

Cello

Emanuele Silvestri
Joanna Pachucka
Daniel Petrovitsch
Mario Rio
Gé van Leeuwen
Eelco Beinema
Carla Schrijner
Pepijn Meeuws
Yi-Ting Fang

Double Bass

Matthew Midgley
Ying Lai Green
Jonathan Focquaert
Robert Franenberg
Harke Wiersma
Arjen Leendertz
Ricardo Neto

Flute

Juliette Hurel
Joséphine Olech
Désirée Woudenberg

Flute/Piccolo

Beatriz Da Baião

Oboe

Remco de Vries
Karel Schoofs
Anja van der Maten

Oboe/Cor Anglais

Ron Tjihuis

Clarinet

Julien Hervé
Bruno Bonansea

Clarinet/ Bass Clarinet

Romke-Jan Wijmenga

Bassoon

Pieter Nuytten
Lola Descours
Marianne Prommel

Bassoon/ Contrabassoon

Hans Wisse

Horn

David Fernández
Alonso
Wendy Leliveld
Richard Speetjens
Laurens Otto
Pierre Buizer

Trumpet

Alex Elia
Simon Wierenga
Jos Verspagen

Trombone

Pierre Volders
Alexander Verbeek
Remko de Jager

Bass Trombone

Rommert Groenhof

Tuba

Hendrik-Jan Renes

Timpani

Danny van de Wal

Percussion

Ronald Ent
Martijn Boom
Adriaan Feyaerts

Harp

Charlotte Sprenkels