

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Sakari Oramo and Vilde Frang: Dean, Britten and Sibelius

Thursday, February 11, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Sakari Oramo, conductor · Vilde Frang, violin

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	DEAN b. 1961 <i>Phantoms: Scenes for Orchestra(s)</i>	
2	BRITTEN 1913–1976 <i>Violin Concerto, Op. 15</i>	32'
3	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82</i>	30'
	TOTAL MUSIC	62'

Brett Dean

b. 1961

Phantoms: Scenes for Orchestra(s)

ABOUT THE WORK

Phantoms is new, and these concerts are its first performances. It was commissioned by the Berliner Philharmoniker Foundation from Brett Dean, who is the orchestra's Composer in Res-

idence for the 2026/27 season. The connection is an old one. Dean played the viola in this orchestra for fourteen years before leaving in 1999 to compose full time, and the orchestra says he likes to write pieces that are tailored to his former colleagues. *Phantoms* is the second of two scores commissioned for the residency. The first, *Conversations with Schumann* for soprano and orchestra, opened the season in September with the composer conducting.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The publisher says that *Phantoms* falls into four sections and that each of them, in the spirit of a concerto for orchestra, concentrates to some degree on a different family of instruments. The orchestra's own description speaks of a wild journey through the instrumental sections that gives the musicians plenty of chances to show what they can do. So one way to follow the piece is to notice which group has the foreground at any moment, and when the spotlight moves on.

The other thing to listen for is where the sound is coming from. With an electronic double of the same orchestra in play, there may be moments when it is hard to say whether a phrase was played on the stage or came from the speakers, and others where the two are deliberately set apart. The seat you are in will shape what you hear more than it does in most concerts.

Benjamin Britten

1913–1976

Violin Concerto, Op. 15

32 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Benjamin Britten was in his mid-twenties when he wrote his only violin concerto, and the world it came out of was falling apart. He composed it in 1938 and 1939 for the Spanish violinist Antonio Brosa, a friend with whom he had played his Suite for violin and piano at the festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music in Barcelona in 1936. Within months of that visit Spain was at civil war. Britten was a convinced pacifist, and commentators have long heard that war in this score: the Boston Symphony Orchestra's programme note calls the concerto his reaction to the tragedy of the Spanish Civil War.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Moderato con moto. The concerto begins with the timpani alone, tapping out a short rhythmic figure answered by a cymbal. That rhythm passes to the bassoon and never really leaves the movement. Over it the violin enters high up with a long, singing melody that keeps slipping between major and minor. A second idea is hard and martial, with the soloist striking out chords. The most striking moment comes when the roles are exchanged:

the orchestral strings take over the opening melody, hushed, while the soloist plays the drum rhythm in plucked and strummed chords.

II. Vivace. A fierce, driving scherzo, one of several pieces from these years that Britten cast as a dance of death. In the quieter middle section listen for a strange passage in which piccolos whistle at the very top of the orchestra while a solo tuba climbs up from the bottom, with nothing in between. The movement ends in a long cadenza for the violin alone, which recalls the drum rhythm and the opening melody and leads straight into the finale.

III. Passacaglia: Andante lento. The trombones, silent until now, enter as the cadenza ends with the slow, rising and falling theme on which the finale is built. The variations that follow change character constantly: restless, biting, dance-like, then a broad march. At the close the music settles towards D, and the violin is left trilling between the two notes that would make the harmony major or minor. Britten leaves the question open, and the concerto ends on that uncertainty.

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Symphony No. 5 in E-flat major, Op. 82

30 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Jean Sibelius conducted the first performance of his Fifth Symphony in Helsinki on 8 December 1915, his fiftieth birthday, which Finland celebrated as a national occasion. The audience loved it. The composer did not, and what is played today is a different piece from the one heard that night. He withdrew the score, brought out a revised version exactly a year later, withdrew that too, and only reached the final form in 1919, when he conducted it in Helsinki on 24 November. In a letter of 1918 he described the symphony as “practically composed anew”.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Tempo molto moderato, Allegro moderato. The symphony opens with a soft horn call over a drum roll, answered by woodwinds in chirping thirds. Most of what follows can be traced back to these first bars. The music builds in long waves, darkens in a passage for solo bassoon over murmuring strings, and then, at a great brass climax, changes gear: the pulse shifts into a lilting three-in-a-bar and what was a slow movement has become a

scherzo. This is the join Sibelius made in his revision. From here the tempo increases step by step to a headlong finish.

II. Andante mosso, quasi allegretto. A calm set of variations on a simple theme, first heard in plucked strings and flutes. It sounds artless, but partway through, in the background, there is a brief hint of the swinging figure that will dominate the finale.

III. Allegro molto. A rush of whispering strings sets the finale going. Then the horns begin a broad, tolling pattern of rising and falling notes, the theme Sibelius linked to his swans, and over it the woodwinds and strings sing a long melody. The swinging theme returns at the end, slower and grander, in the home key. The close is one of the strangest in any symphony: six separate chords, each followed by silence.

Tonight's artists

Vilde Frang *violin*

Vilde Frang knows this concerto from the inside: she recorded it for Warner Classics, paired with Korngold's concerto, with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony under James Gaffigan. Britten's solo part asks for more than brilliance. Much of it lies very high and very quiet, and the long final pages depend on a player who can hold a line at the edge of silence, which is the kind of playing Frang is admired for.

Vilde Frang is a Norwegian violinist, born in 1986. She was twelve when Mariss Jansons engaged her to play with the Oslo Philharmonic. She studied at the Barratt Due Institute of Music in Oslo, then with Kolja Blacher in Hamburg and with Ana Chumachenco at the Kronberg Academy, and she was a scholarship holder of the Anne-Sophie Mutter Foundation. A Borletti-Buitoni Trust fellowship in 2007 led to work with the pianist Mitsuko Uchida. In 2012 she received the Credit Suisse Young Artist Award, which brought her debut with the Vienna Philharmonic under Bernard Haitink at the Lucerne Festival. She now appears with the leading orchestras of Europe and the United States and is a frequent chamber musician at festivals such as Salzburg, Verbier and Lockenhaus. She records exclusively for Warner Classics, and her albums have won awards including the Edison Klassiek, the Diapason d'Or and the Gramophone Award. She plays the 1734 "Rode" Guarneri del Gesù.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-02-11-oramo>

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