

Symphonic Landscapes: Kirill Petrenko and Leif Ove Andsnes in Sibelius, Grieg and the Pastoral Symphony

Wednesday, April 28, 2027 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Kirill Petrenko, conductor · Leif Ove Andsnes, piano

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Night Ride and Sunrise, Op. 55</i>	15'
2	GRIEG 1843–1907 <i>Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16</i>	30'
3	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 ('Pastoral')</i>	40'
	TOTAL MUSIC	85'

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Night Ride and Sunrise, Op. 55

THE COMPOSER

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) is Finland's greatest composer and one of the supreme symphonists of the twentieth century. His music, above all the seven symphonies and tone poems such as *Finlandia* and *Tapiola*, became inseparable from Finland's emerging national identity during its struggle against Russian domination, and he was revered as a national hero in his own lifetime. His style evolved from late-Romantic richness toward an increasingly concentrated, organic and original conception of symphonic form, in which themes seem to grow and fuse like living things, shot through with the cold light and vast spaces of the Nordic landscape. Famously, after completing the Seventh Symphony, the incidental music to *The Tempest* and the tone poem *Tapiola* in the mid-1920s, he fell almost completely silent for the last thirty years of his life: the 'silence of Järvenpää'.

15 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Night Ride and Sunrise is among the less often played of Sibelius's tone poems, and among the oddest. He completed it in November 1908. It was the first orchestral score he finished after a series of painful operations that year to remove a tumour from his throat, and the experience has been linked with the sparer, more inward manner of the works that followed, the string quartet *Voces intimae* and the Fourth Symphony.

Sibelius sent the manuscript to the Russian pianist and conductor Alexander Siloti, who gave the first performance in St Petersburg on 23 January 1909. It went badly. Siloti later admitted that he had made cuts in the score, and the reviews were poor.

Where the piece came from Sibelius explained differently at different times. In one account the first idea came to him in Rome in the spring of 1901, on seeing the Colosseum. In another, told late in life to his secretary Santeri Levas, it was the memory of a journey by horse-drawn sleigh between Helsinki and Kerava around the turn of the century, during which he watched a spectacular sunrise. The two stories do not exclude each other, and neither turns the work into a travelogue. What the title promises is what happens: a long ride through darkness, and then daylight.

The music is as plain as the title. For about half its length it does almost nothing but ride, on a single obsessive rhythm, in a way that has reminded later listeners of minimalism. Then it stops riding, and one of the most beautiful dawns in orchestral music takes its place. The piece is not built like a symphonic movement, with themes in conflict, but as two contrasted states joined by a transition.

Kirill Petrenko places it at the head of a programme of landscapes: a Norwegian concerto and Beethoven's "Pastoral" follow. The orchestra takes the same programme to the Nordic countries immediately afterwards, beginning with its Europakonzert on 1 May in Turku, in Sibelius's Finland.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The ride. After a few violent opening bars the strings settle into a galloping long-short rhythm, quiet and relentless, that runs for minutes on end. The harmony shifts beneath it, the volume swells and drops, and little else changes. Eventually the woodwind add a plaintive, drooping melody over the hoofbeats.

The transition. The rhythm at last gives out. The strings alone take up the woodwind's melody and turn it into something like a hymn, broad and eloquent. This is the hinge of the piece.

Sunrise. The first light comes in the horns, with soft chords that swell and overlap. Woodwind figures stir above them, the brass harmonies widen step by step, and the work ends not in a blaze but in a calm, full glow, fading on a quiet chord.

Edvard Grieg

1843–1907

30 minutes

Piano Concerto in A minor, Op. 16

THE COMPOSER

Edvard Grieg, born in Bergen in 1843, is Norway's best-loved composer and one of the defining voices of musical nationalism in the nineteenth century. Encouraged by the violinist Ole Bull, he trained at the Leipzig Conservatory, but it was his later immersion in Norwegian folk music, with its modal inflections, drones and dance rhythms, that gave his music its unmistakable accent. His Piano Concerto in A minor, written when he was only twenty-four, made his name across Europe, and his incidental music to Ibsen's *Peer Gynt* became some of the most famous music ever written for the theatre. A master of the miniature, he poured much of his finest invention into songs and into the ten books of *Lyric Pieces* for piano. In later life he lived at Troldhaugen, his villa outside Bergen, touring widely as pianist and conductor; he died in Bergen in 1907, a national hero.

ABOUT THE WORK

Grieg wrote his only piano concerto in the summer of 1868, when he was in his mid-twenties. He and his wife Nina were spending the season at Søllerød in Denmark, and the concerto was the product of a few unusually happy and productive months. It was first played in Copenhagen on 3 April 1869 by the pianist Edmund Neupert, with Holger Simon Paulli conducting, and it has been popular ever since.

The model is easy to hear. As a fifteen-year-old student in Leipzig, Grieg had heard Clara Schumann play her husband's Piano Concerto, and the experience stayed with him. Ten years later he chose the same key, A minor, and began in the same way: Schumann opens with a single stroke from the orchestra and a cascade of chords from the soloist, and Grieg does likewise, adding a drum roll for good measure.

What makes the piece his own is what he had found since Leipzig, the folk music of Norway. The falling figure that the piano hurls down the keyboard in the first bars is a favourite melodic turn of Norwegian

folk tunes and of Grieg's own music. The finale is built on the rhythms of Norwegian dances, the leaping halling and the triple-time springdans, and there are passages that imitate the country fiddle.

In 1870 Grieg took the manuscript to Franz Liszt in Rome. Liszt played it through at sight, orchestral part and all, before a room full of musicians, and was delighted by it. Grieg himself was never quite finished with the piece. He revised it many times over the following decades, usually in small ways, and completed the last version only weeks before his death in 1907.

The soloist in these concerts is Leif Ove Andsnes, a Norwegian pianist in the Norwegian concerto.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro molto moderato. A drum roll swells from nothing, the orchestra strikes one chord, and the piano crashes down the length of the keyboard. After that flourish the woodwind give out the main theme quietly, a tune with a march rhythm that is meant to be played gently. The second theme belongs to the cellos, warm and songlike. Near the end the soloist has a long cadenza, which is Grieg's own and builds from a murmur to full thunder before the opening flourish returns.

Adagio. Muted strings play a long, calm melody in a distant key, D-flat major. The piano does not take it up at first but answers with delicate filigree of its own, and only later states the theme in full, grandly. The movement leads into the finale almost without a pause.

Allegro moderato molto e marcato. The main theme is a halling, stamped out by the piano with strong accents. In the middle the dance stops and a solo flute plays a new melody, high and still, over shimmering strings: a clearing in the forest. The dance returns, then changes into a quick triple-time version of itself, and at the very end the flute's quiet tune comes back transformed, in the full orchestra and the major key, with the piano thundering chords beneath it.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 ('Pastoral')

THE COMPOSER

Beethoven needs little introduction, but the period in which he wrote his Second Symphony does. Born in Bonn in 1770 and trained in Vienna under Haydn, by 1800 he was already one of the most talked-about pianist-composers in Vienna. Around the same time, Beethoven had to face an alarming truth: his hearing was deteriorating, and would never recover. By 1802 he had retreated to the village of Heiligenstadt outside Vienna, where, in a state of suicidal despair, he wrote the famous letter to his brothers known as the *Heiligenstadt Testament*, in which he confessed his condition and his agony. The letter, never sent in his lifetime, was found among his papers after his death.

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven's Fifth and Sixth Symphonies are twins. He worked on them side by side, completed both in 1808, and introduced them to the world at the same concert, the long evening of his own music that he conducted at the Theater an der Wien in Vienna on 22 December 1808. They could hardly be less alike on the surface: one all struggle, the other a walk in the country.

Music about the countryside was nothing new. Composers before Beethoven had imitated storms and birdsong, and the "characteristic symphony" with descriptive titles was a familiar type. Beethoven accepted the tradition and was wary of it. He gave each of the five movements a title, and he added a famous caution: the symphony was "more the expression of feeling than painting". What he wanted was not a picture of a brook but what it is like to sit beside one.

The country mattered to him. He left Vienna for the surrounding villages whenever he could and spent a great deal of time walking there. The Berliner Philharmoniker's note on the symphony quotes him on another benefit: in the country, his failing hearing troubled him less.

The "Pastoral" is unusual in other ways. It has five movements, not four, and the last three run into each other without a break, so that the peasants' dance is interrupted by the storm and the storm clears into the shepherd's song. And it is remarkably unhurried. Where the Fifth compresses and drives, the Sixth repeats small figures over and over, as leaves or ripples repeat, and lets the harmony change slowly.

Kirill Petrenko, quoted in the orchestra's note, puts the point this way: Beethoven wanted "first and foremost to show what we feel when we hear birds, or the fear we have when a storm comes". He calls it a prefiguration of Romanticism.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside. The violins begin with a short, simple phrase and pause on it, as if taking a breath. Almost everything in the movement grows from that phrase and its little rhythmic cells, repeated dozens of times with constantly changing colour.

II. Scene by the brook. The murmuring of the water runs through the lower strings, with two muted solo cellos in the middle of the texture. Near the end the music halts for three birds, which Beethoven names in the score: a nightingale (flute), a quail (oboe) and a cuckoo (two clarinets).

III. Merry gathering of country folk. A rustic scherzo. In the middle section Beethoven affectionately mocks a village band: the oboe comes in off the beat, and the bassoon can manage only a few notes.

IV. Thunderstorm. The dance breaks off. Low strings rumble, raindrops patter in the violins, and the storm bursts. Beethoven saves instruments for this moment: the timpani and piccolo play only here, and the trombones enter for the first time.

V. Shepherd's song: happy and thankful feelings after the storm. A clarinet and then a horn call across the valley, and the violins turn the call into a broad, swinging melody. The Berlin note hears in it not jubilation but humility. The tune returns in ever richer variations, and just before the end a muted horn recalls the opening call once more, followed by two firm closing chords.

Tonight's artists

Leif Ove Andsnes *piano*

Leif Ove Andsnes is the soloist in Grieg's Piano Concerto, in Berlin and then on the orchestra's tour of the Nordic countries with the same programme in early May.

Leif Ove Andsnes, born on the Norwegian island of Karmøy in 1970, is one of the most admired pianists of his generation, celebrated for the clarity, intelligence, refinement and complete lack of showy excess in his playing. He studied with Jiří Hlinka at the Bergen Music Conservatory and made his Oslo debut in 1987, going on to a major international career as a recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician. Among his most acclaimed projects are his complete survey of the Beethoven piano concertos (his 'Beethoven Journey,' which he directed from the keyboard) and his Mozart and Sibelius recordings, as well as his lifelong championing of his compatriot Grieg. A musician of probing seriousness and patrician taste, he is an ideal interpreter of Beethoven's dramatic Third Concerto.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Sibelius**

Andrew Barnett, Yale University Press 2010

A full life and works by a writer closely involved with the complete Sibelius recordings; it places Night Ride and Sunrise in the difficult year of the throat operations and the turn towards a sparer style.

ACCESSIBLE **Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision**

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2017

A chapter on each of the nine symphonies, drawing on the sketchbooks; the one on the Pastoral shows how it grew alongside the Fifth and what Beethoven meant by feeling over painting.

DEEPER **Beethoven: The Music and the Life**

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2005

Lockwood's biography weaves the life through close discussion of the works, and gives the background to the concert of December 1808 at which the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies were first heard.

SOURCES

1. Symphonic Landscapes: Kirill Petrenko and Leif Ove Andsnes, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/57150/>
2. Concert on 01.05.2027: Berliner Philharmoniker, Petrenko, Andsnes (Europakonzert, Turku), Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/57153/>

Ludwig van Beethoven ·Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68 ('Pastoral')

3. Concert on 02.05.2027: Berliner Philharmoniker, Petrenko, Andsnes (Scandinavia tour, Gothenburg), Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/concert/calendar/57154/>
4. Nightride and Sunrise, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nightride_and_Sunrise
5. Night Ride and Sunrise, Op. 55, Sibelius One. <https://sibeliusone.com/members-area/programme-notes/night-ride-and-sunrise-op-55/>
6. Öinen ratsastus ja auringonnousu, Jean Sibelius (Finnish Club of Helsinki). https://www.sibelius.klubi.fi/english/musiikki/ork_oinen_ratsastus.htm
7. Piano Concerto (Grieg), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_\(Grieg\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_(Grieg))
8. Programme Note: Concerto for Piano and Orchestra in A minor, op. 16, Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/edvard-grieg-concerto-for-piano-and-orchestra-in-a-minor-op-16>
9. Grieg: Piano Concerto in A minor, Opus 16, Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/grieg-piano-concerto>
10. Symphony No. 6 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._6_\(Beethoven\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._6_(Beethoven))
11. Programme Note: Symphony No. 6 in F major, op. 68 "Pastoral", Berliner Philharmoniker. <https://www.berliner-philharmoniker.de/en/programme-notes/ludwig-van-beethoven-symphony-no-6-in-f-major-op-68-pastoral>
12. Sibelius, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300163971>
13. Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393353853>
14. Beethoven: The Music and the Life, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393326383>



CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2027-04-28-petrenko>

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