

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Klaus Mäkelä in Las Palmas: two Seventh Symphonies, and Lisa Batiashvili plays Sibelius

Monday, February 1, 2027 · 19:30 · Auditorio Alfredo Kraus

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Lisa Batiashvili, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105</i>	22'
2	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47</i>	34'
3	BEETHOVEN 1770–1827 <i>Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92</i>	37'
TOTAL MUSIC		93'

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105

22 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Sibelius's last symphony lasts barely more than twenty minutes and is played without a break. It took him the better part of ten years. The earliest ideas go back to about 1914, when he was at work on the Fifth Symphony, and for a long time the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh grew side by side in his sketchbooks. In 1918 he set down a plan for the Seventh: 'joy of life and vitality', with passionate episodes, in three movements, the last of them a 'Hellenic rondo'. The plan did not hold. By 1923 the drafts had turned into a single continuous span, growing out of what had begun as a slow movement.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The opening is one of the quietest in the repertoire: a soft stroke on the timpani, then a scale that climbs slowly through the strings, off the beat, and lands on a chord from a quite different key. Woodwind answer with a brief, thoughtful phrase. Out of this the violas and cellos begin a long hymn, divided into many parts, which gathers the rest of the strings as it rises.

At the top of that climb a solo trombone enters with a broad, calm melody over the full orchestra. It is the theme the whole work turns on, and in the sketches it is said to carry the name of his wife, Aino. It will be heard three times, and it is worth fixing in the memory at this first appearance.

The pace then quickens almost without notice. The strings and woodwind trade light, detached figures, and for a while the music has the character of a scherzo. It darkens: the strings begin to swirl in rising and falling scales, and the trombone theme comes back above them, now in the minor and sounding like a warning. A second fast section follows, a dancing passage in a brighter mood, which is generally taken to be what survives of the 'Hellenic rondo'.

The third arrival of the trombone theme is the climax of the symphony, with the strings climbing higher and higher beneath it. Afterwards the brass fall away and the strings are left alone at full intensity. In the last minute Sibelius glances back at earlier ideas, among them a turn of harmony from his own *Valse triste*, and then the strings pull the note B slowly up to C. That final step, held back until the very end, closes the work on a plain chord of C major.

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

34 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Sibelius wanted, as a young man, to be a violinist. He gave up the ambition, but when he came to write his only concerto it was for the instrument he knew from the inside. The idea was with him from 1899. By the autumn of 1903 the work was far enough advanced for him to promise the dedication to Willy Burmester, a celebrated virtuoso who had once led the orchestra in Helsinki and who offered to give the first performance in Berlin. His wife Aino described him that winter playing the themes on his violin day and night, with so many ideas that he was almost dizzy.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Allegro moderato. There is no orchestral introduction. Over a soft, pulsing cushion of strings the soloist enters at once with a long, wandering melody that seems to come out of the far distance. A second theme arrives dark and low on the violin's G string. Where a development section would normally stand, the orchestra falls silent and the soloist plays a long cadenza built on the opening theme, full of double stops, trills and runs. When the

themes return they are darker in colour, and the movement ends with the main theme's dramatic material at full strength.

II. Adagio di molto. A short phrase from clarinets and oboes leads in the violin's broad, heartfelt melody, played over plucked strings. It asks for restraint and simplicity more than brilliance. The orchestra turns stormy in the middle of the movement, and the violin answers with plaintive double stops before the opening melody returns and the music sinks to a serene close.

III. Allegro, ma non tanto. Four bars of drumming rhythm from timpani and low strings set the pace, and the violin leaps in on its lowest string with a dance theme of fierce energy. Tovey called this movement 'a polonaise for polar bears', a joke that has stuck to it ever since. A second theme, with something of the waltz about it, is given first to the orchestra. The solo part grows steadily harder, with passages in thirds, arpeggios, octaves and high harmonics, and the major key is won only in the final bars, where the violin's line climbs upward and the orchestra seals the ending with it.

Ludwig van Beethoven

1770–1827

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

37 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Beethoven composed his Seventh Symphony in 1811 and 1812, part of it during a stay at the Bohemian spa of Teplitz, where he had gone for the sake of his health. It is dedicated to Count Moritz von Fries. More than a year passed before it was heard. The first performance took place on 8 December 1813 in the hall of the University of Vienna, at a charity concert for soldiers wounded at the Battle of Hanau, with Beethoven himself conducting.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Poco sostenuto, Vivace. The slow introduction is unusually long, almost a movement in itself, with long rising scales and excursions into the keys of C and F. At the end everything shrinks to a single note, E, repeated more than sixty times until it catches the skipping dotted rhythm of the Vivace. That rhythm then runs through almost every bar of the movement.

II. Allegretto. A single unstable chord in the winds opens the movement. Then violas and cellos begin a quiet march in A minor on a pattern of one long note, two short

and two long, and the theme is at first little more than one repeated pitch. It is handed upward through the strings, gathering a counter-melody and growing each time, like a procession approaching from far away. Gentler episodes in A major bring relief. This is the movement that was encored in 1813, and it has had a life of its own ever since.

III. Presto. A racing scherzo in F major, full of sudden changes between loud and soft. The slower trio, a broad tune in D major said to be based on an Austrian pilgrims' hymn, comes round twice instead of the usual once.

IV. Allegro con brio. The finale goes at a relentless pace. Its whirling main theme is driven by heavy accents, and the movement outdoes even the scherzo in sheer force. The energy never lets up, and by the last pages the music seems to dissolve into pure sound and motion.

Tonight's artists

Lisa Batiashvili *violin*

Lisa Batiashvili has lived with this concerto since she was sixteen, when she was a prizewinner at the Sibelius Competition in Helsinki, and she has been a guest of the Concertgebouw Orchestra for some twenty-five years. On this tour she plays it beside the composer's last symphony, so that the first half of the concert shows Sibelius twenty years apart: the Romantic of 1905 and the severe master of 1924. The conductor, Klaus Mäkelä, is a Finn himself. The same programme travels on to Tenerife, Zaragoza and Seville.

Lisa Batiashvili was born in 1979 in Tbilisi, Georgia, to a violinist father, who gave her first lessons when she was four, and a pianist mother. The family moved to Germany in 1991. She studied in Hamburg with Mark Lubotsky, a pupil of David Oistrakh, and later with Ana Chumachenco. In 1995, aged sixteen, she took second prize at the International Jean Sibelius Violin Competition in Helsinki, and from 1999 to 2001 she was among the first BBC Radio 3 New Generation Artists. Alongside the central concerto repertoire she has given first performances of new works, including Magnus Lindberg's Violin Concerto, which is dedicated to her. She has held residencies with the New York Philharmonic and, in the 2023–24 season, the Berliner Philharmoniker. She records for Deutsche Grammophon, and plays a Guarneri 'del Gesù' violin made in 1739. In 2021 she set up the Lisa Batiashvili Foundation to support young musicians from Georgia.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-02-01-makela>

Version 1, 7 October 2026