

Klaus Mäkelä in Valencia: Lisa Batiashvili plays Sibelius, and the Symphonie fantastique

Saturday, February 6, 2027 · 19:00 · Palau de la Música de València

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Lisa Batiashvili, violin

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	SIBELIUS 1865–1957 <i>Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47</i>	34'
2	BERLIOZ 1803–1869 <i>Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14</i>	50'
TOTAL MUSIC		84'

Jean Sibelius

1865–1957

Violin Concerto in D minor, Op. 47

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'.

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

34 minutes

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.

Then Sibelius, short of money, decided to bring the premiere forward and hold it in Helsinki. Burmester could not come. The solo part went to Victor Nováček, a teacher at the Helsinki conservatory, who had little time to learn an extremely difficult piece that the composer had barely finished. The first performance, on 8 February 1904 with Sibelius conducting, was not a success. The critic Karl Flodin, normally a supporter, wrote that the composer had given in to conventional virtuosity.

Sibelius withdrew the concerto and rewrote it. He shortened the first movement, removed a second cadenza and a good deal of display, and tightened the finale. The new version was introduced in Berlin on 19 October 1905, with Karel Halíř as soloist and Richard Strauss conducting. Burmester, passed over a second time, was so offended that he never played the work. It is the 1905 version that became established, though slowly: the concerto's worldwide popularity dates from the 1930s, when Jascha Heifetz recorded it. The original score stayed in the family's keeping and was first recorded only in 1991.

What sets the piece apart from most virtuoso concertos is its seriousness of construction. The orchestra has real material of its own, dark in colour, and the solo cadenza in the first movement is not an interruption but the place where the themes are developed. The scholar and critic Donald Tovey wrote that he had not met 'a more original, a more masterly, and a more exhilarating work'.

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.

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

THE COMPOSER

Hector Berlioz was music's great revolutionary. Born in 1803 near Grenoble, he was expected to follow his father, a physician, into medicine and dutifully enrolled at the School of Medicine in Paris. But the lure of music proved irresistible.

Berlioz's path was never easy. His independent mind and refusal to follow traditional rules put him at odds with the conservative Parisian musical establishment. He won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1830. Throughout his life his music was more appreciated abroad, in Germany, Britain and Russia, than at home. Yet his innovations in orchestration, program music, and musical narrative transformed the art form.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Berlioz never studied the piano and played it haltingly at best. The orchestra was his instrument, and he expanded its expressive possibilities in ways no one had imagined.

ABOUT THE WORK

On 11 September 1827 a company of English actors played Hamlet in Paris. In the audience was Hector Berlioz, twenty-three years old. He was overwhelmed twice over: by Shakespeare, and by the Irish actress Harriet Smithson, who played Ophelia. He wrote her letters, which went unanswered. She left Paris in 1829 without having met him.

50 minutes

The symphony he wrote early in 1830 turned this obsession into music. He called it 'Episode in the Life of an Artist' and had a printed programme handed to the audience. A young musician of morbid sensibility, despairing in love, takes opium. The dose is too weak to kill him and instead brings on a series of visions, in which the woman he loves has become a melody that follows him everywhere. Berlioz called this melody the *idée fixe*. He had written the tune two years earlier, for a competition cantata, and it appears in each of the five movements, changed every time by its surroundings.

The first performance took place at the Paris Conservatoire on 5 December 1830, conducted by François-Antoine Habeneck. Beethoven had been dead for less than four years, and his symphonies were still new to Paris. Berlioz revered them. The five-movement plan and the scene in the country both look back to the Pastoral Symphony, but nothing in Beethoven sounds like this. The score asks for two harps, a cor anglais, an oboe placed offstage, a shrill small clarinet, bells, four players on the timpani and two ophicleides, deep brass instruments whose parts are now taken by tubas.

Smithson was not at the premiere. She heard the symphony two years later, on 9 December 1832, when Berlioz, back from his prizewinner's stay in Italy, presented a revised version together with a sequel, *Lélio*. They met the next day and married the following year. The marriage was not happy, and by 1844 they had separated. Berlioz himself came to feel that the music could do without its story, and in later years he played the programme down.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

I. Rêveries, Passions. A slow introduction of muted, sighing strings stands for the vague longings of the artist before he has seen his beloved. When the Allegro begins, violins and flute play the *idée fixe* almost unaccompanied: a long melody that climbs by stages and keeps falling back. Fix it in the ear here, since everything later depends on recognising it.

II. Un bal. Harps and shimmering strings set the scene for a waltz. In the middle of the dance the *idée fixe* drifts in on flute and oboe, as if the artist had caught sight of her across the room, and it returns once more, on a clarinet, before the brilliant close.

III. Scène aux champs. A cor anglais calls, and an oboe answers from offstage: two shepherds piping to each other. The long, calm movement that follows is troubled at its centre, when the

beloved's theme returns over agitated low strings. At the end the cor anglais calls again. There is no answer, only distant thunder from four timpani.

IV. Marche au supplice. The artist dreams that he has killed his beloved and is being led to the scaffold. Muffled drums and growling low brass alternate with a blazing march for the full band. At the last moment a solo clarinet begins the *idée fixe*, his final thought of her, and a single crashing chord cuts it off.

V. Songe d'une nuit du sabbat. He sees his own funeral, attended by witches and monsters. The beloved's theme arrives squealing on the small clarinet, turned into a vulgar jig. Bells toll, and bassoons and tubas intone the *Dies irae*, the chant from the Mass for the Dead. A witches' round dance starts up as a fugue in the strings, and near the end Berlioz plays both at once. Listen too for the dry clatter when the violins strike the strings with the wood of their bows.

Tonight's artists

Lisa Batiashvili *violin*

Lisa Batiashvili came to notice as a sixteen-year-old prizewinner at the Sibelius Competition in Helsinki, and the composer's concerto has stayed at the centre of her repertoire ever since. She has been a guest of the Concertgebouw Orchestra for some twenty-five years. In Valencia the concerto is paired with Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, so that the evening sets two very different kinds of Romantic intensity side by side: the inward, northern lyricism of Sibelius and the theatrical fever of Berlioz. According to the hall's season announcement, this is Klaus Mäkelä's first appearance at the Palau de la Música.

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.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Sibelius**

Andrew Barnett, Yale University Press 2010

A full life and works that follows the Violin Concerto from its first version of 1904 to the revision of 1905, by a writer closely involved with the recordings of both.

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Berlioz**

Peter Bloom, Cambridge University Press 1998

A short, readable biography that sets the Symphonie fantastique in the Paris of 1830 and follows what became of Berlioz and Harriet Smithson afterwards.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz**

Peter Bloom, Cambridge University Press 2000

Essays on every side of Berlioz's work, with chapters on the symphonies and on his handling of the orchestra that bear directly on the Symphonie fantastique.

SOURCES

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2. Presentación de la temporada del Palau de la Música de València, Ajuntament de València. <https://www.valencia.es/cas/actualidad/-/content/presentaci%C3%B3n-temporada-palau-m%C3%BAsica-val%C3%A8ncia>
3. Batiashvili, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra & Mäkelä, Palau de la Música Catalana. https://www.palaumusica.cat/en/batiashvili-royal-concertgebouw-orchestra-makela_1586399
4. Violin Concerto (Sibelius), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_\(Sibelius\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_(Sibelius))
5. Violin concerto, Jean Sibelius (Finnish Club of Helsinki). https://www.sibelius.klubi.fi/english/musiikki/ork_viulukonsertto.htm
6. Symphonie fantastique, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphonie_fantastique
7. Berlioz: Symphonie fantastique (programme note), Boston Symphony Orchestra. <https://www.bso.org/works/symphonie-fantastique>
8. Sibelius, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780300163971>
9. The Life of Berlioz, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521485487>
10. The Cambridge Companion to Berlioz, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521596381>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-02-06-makela>

Version 1, 7 October 2026