

ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

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

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.

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

Symphonie fantastique, Op. 14

50 minutes

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.

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 Gram-

mophon, 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-2027-02-06-makela>

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