ROYAL CONCERTGEBOUW ORCHESTRA

Klaus Mäkelä in Baden-Baden: two Seventh Symphonies, and Renaud Capuçon plays Sibelius

Thursday, March 25, 2027 · 18:00 · Festspielhaus Baden-Baden

Klaus Mäkelä, conductor · Renaud Capuçon, violin

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

Jean Sibelius

22 minutes

1865–1957

Symphony No. 7 in C major, Op. 105

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'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.

The last stage was hard. Sibelius was in his late fifties, his hands shook, and he drank while he wrote, to steady them as he put it. He finished the score in March 1924 and conducted the first performance in Stockholm on 24 March. The programme did not call it a symphony. It was announced as a Fantasia sinfonica, and Sibelius hesitated for some time before he gave it a number. When the score was printed in 1925 the title page read Symphony No. 7, in one movement.

The name matters, because the piece does what a symphony does by other means. A classical symphony sets movements in different tempos and keys against one another. Here almost everything of importance happens in C, major or minor, and the contrast comes from speed: the music moves from a slow opening through quicker, lighter episodes and back again, usually so gradually that the listener cannot say where one section ended and the next began. Slow movement, scherzo and finale are all present, but folded into one another.

Sibelius lived for another thirty-three years and never published another symphony. He completed the tone poem Tapiola, and he worked for years on an Eighth Symphony, but he is believed to have burned whatever he had written of it at Ainola, his home north of Helsinki. The Seventh therefore stands as his last word in the form.

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

34 minutes

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 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.

Ludwig van Beethoven

37 minutes

1770–1827

Symphony No. 7 in A major, Op. 92

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 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.

It was one of the great public successes of his life. Vienna was in a patriotic fever as Napoleon's power collapsed, and the same concert included the first performance of Beethoven's noisy battle piece Wellington's Victory. The orchestra, led by his friend Ignaz Schuppanzigh, was full of well-known musicians who had volunteered their

services, among them Louis Spohr, Hummel, Meyerbeer and Salieri. The audience insisted on hearing the second movement again immediately, and the whole concert had to be repeated. Spohr left a description of Beethoven on the podium, flinging his arms apart at a sudden accent and leaping into the air at a loud entry. Beethoven, for his part, counted the symphony among his best works.

The Seventh has no programme and no nickname. What holds it together is rhythm. Each of the four movements is built on a short, obsessively repeated rhythmic pattern, and the energy that results has struck listeners from the start as physical. Richard Wagner, writing in 1850, called the symphony 'the apotheosis of the dance', meaning dance raised to its highest form, and the phrase has never been bettered. The harmony is as bold as the rhythm. Beethoven keeps swerving from the home key of A major into the distant keys of C and F, and the plan of the whole work rests on that tension.

Tonight's performance falls in a Beethoven year: 2027 marks two hundred years since his death in Vienna in March 1827.

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

Renaud Capuçon *violin*

Renaud Capuçon is the soloist in the Sibelius concerto for this evening of the Easter Festival in Baden-Baden, where the Concertgebouw Orchestra and Klaus Mäkelä are in residence. The orchestra played the concerto on tour earlier in the season with another soloist, so this is a fresh meeting: a French violinist, raised on chamber music, in a score whose first minutes belong to the violin almost alone. The orchestra's own listing pairs the concerto with Sibelius's Seventh Symphony and ends with Beethoven's Seventh.

Renaud Capuçon is a French violinist, born in Chambéry in 1976. He studied at the Paris Conservatoire with Gérard Poulet and Veda Reynolds, taking first prizes there in chamber music in 1992 and in violin in 1993, and in 1995 he won the Prize of the Berlin Academy of Arts. Claudio Abbado then chose him as concertmaster of the Gustav Mahler Jugendorchester. Since then he has divided his time between concertos with the leading orchestras and chamber music, much of it with his younger brother, the cellist Gautier Capuçon. The French Victoires de la Musique named him new talent of the year in 2000 and instrumental soloist of the year in 2005.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland**

Glenda Dawn Goss, University of Chicago Press 2009

A life of Sibelius set against the making of modern Finland, which helps explain how the composer of the Violin Concerto became the composer of the Seventh Symphony.

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

Lewis Lockwood, W. W. Norton 2017

A chapter on each of the nine symphonies, written for the general listener, with the Seventh placed in the Vienna of 1812 and 1813.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius**

Daniel M. Grimley (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2004

Essays by Sibelius scholars on the symphonies, the concerto and their reception, including the late style that the Seventh brings to a close.

SOURCES

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2. Op reis: Beethovens Zevende symfonie, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra (Dutch). https://www.concertgebouworkest.nl/nl/agenda/op-reis-beethovens-zevende-symfonie-2027-03-25/
3. Sibelius Violin Concerto, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden. https://www.festspielhaus.de/en/program/sibelius-violin-concerto/95
4. Osterfestspiele 2027, Festspielhaus Baden-Baden. https://www.festspielhaus.de/en/festivals/2027/osterfestspiele/69
5. Renaud Capuçon, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaud_Capu%C3%A7on
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9. Violin Concerto (Sibelius), Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Violin_Concerto_(Sibelius)
10. Violin concerto, Jean Sibelius (Finnish Club of Helsinki). https://www.sibelius.klubi.fi/english/musiikki/ork_viulukonsertto.htm
11. Symphony No. 7 (Beethoven), Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symphony_No._7_(Beethoven)
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13. Beethoven's Seventh: the apotheosis of the dance?, Scottish Chamber Orchestra. https://sco.org.uk/news/beethovens-seventh
14. Sibelius: A Composer's Life and the Awakening of Finland, Open Library. https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780226005478
15. Beethoven's Symphonies: An Artistic Vision, Open Library. https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393353853
16. The Cambridge Companion to Sibelius, Open Library. https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521894609

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https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/rco-2027-03-25-makela

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