

# Programme Notes



## SIBELIUS FESTIVAL: KULLERVO

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FRI 12 NOVEMBER 2021 • 20.15



ROTTERDAMS  
PHILHARMONISCH  
ORKEST



## PROGRAMME

conductor **Jukka-Pekka Saraste**  
soprano **Helena Juntunen**  
baritone **Tommi Hakala**  
chorus **YL Male Voice Choir**

**Jean Sibelius** 1865-1957

*Kullervo*, for soprano, baritone, male  
chorus and orchestra in E minor,  
op. 7 [1892]

- Introduction
- Kullervo's Youth
- Kullervo and His Sister
- Kullervo Goes to Battle
- Kullervo's Death

*Concert ends at about 21.45*

**Most recent performance by our  
orchestra:**

First performance

*One hour before the start of the  
concert, musicologist Michel Khalifa  
will give an introduction to the  
programme, admission €5. Tickets  
are available at the hall, payment by  
debit card. The introduction is free  
for 'Vrienden'. The introduction is in  
Dutch.*

*Jean Sibelius, painting by Eero Järnefelt (1892)*

# Escaping the log fire

**Jean Sibelius was just 26 years old when he presented to the world his choral symphony *Kullervo*. And whilst the public immediately embraced the work - it became Sibelius' first major success - the composer himself had his doubts. In fact, it was touch and go whether *Kullervo* would be performed again in the twentieth century.**

## **At one with an orchestra**

If it had been up to Sibelius, *Kullervo* would have never been performed again. It is an early work from a young composer who till then had only had a few unremarkable compositions to his name. He believed that the fatal imperfections in the work rendered a thorough revision unavoidable; but it was a revision he never made, preferring instead to invest his energies in new ideas. And whilst he did not go so far as to destroy the work (a fate that would later befall the sketches for his long-awaited *Eighth Symphony*), increasing international fame brought with it the fear that *Kullervo* would not properly reflect his true abilities. The nineteen forties brought an end to the embargo when, out of financial necessity, the manuscript was sold to the *Kalevala* Society. However, any reprise of the complete work would have to wait until after Sibelius' death - more than sixty years after its glorious premiere. In fact, whatever reservations Sibelius may have subsequently felt, *Kullervo* had become an absolute hit in 1892 - despite the initial sneering from reluctant orchestral players and the anxiety of the young composer

who had yet to make his mark as a conductor. And whatever the deficiencies in the work, it was its qualities that won attention. Sibelius immediately proved himself at one with an orchestra, possessing an overwhelming sense for atmosphere and an original musical 'voice'. It's recognisable already in the introduction. This is music on an epic scale, describing a mythical world in which everything is noble and infinite. Of course, Sibelius wasn't the first to explore this territory - the path had been laid by the great Richard Wagner - but he did plough his own furrow.

## **Primeval Finland**

The immediate success of the symphony was also the result of the primeval Finnish theme. Music with such a strong nationalistic profile naturally found popularity with a people who, after years of foreign occupation, were on the brink of independence. Furthermore, the choice for a Finnish text was a clear statement in a country where Swedish had always been the dominant language. It was therefore predictable that Sibelius - although raised in the Swedish language himself - would

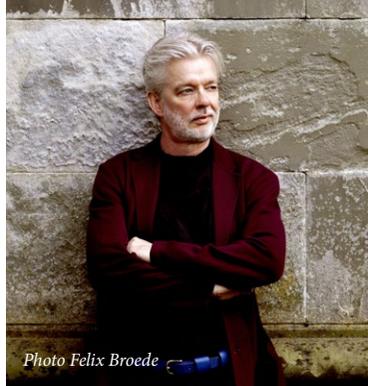


Photo Felix Broede

## **Jukka-Pekka Saraste, Conductor**

**Born:** Heinola, Finland

**Current position:** founder and artistic advisor Lahti Symphony Orchestra; artistic director Tammissaari Festival; artistic director Fiskars Summer Festival, honorary conductor Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra, honorary conductor Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra

**Before:** chief conductor WDR Symphony Orchestra Cologne, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Toronto Symphony Orchestra

**Education:** Sibelius Academy Helsinki, conducting with Jorma Panula

**Awards:** Pro Finlandia Prize, Sibelius Medaille, Finnish State Prize for Music

**Guest positions:** London Philharmonic Orchestra, Philharmonia Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Gewandhaus Orchestra Leipzig, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, Munich Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, Staatskapelle Dresden, Cleveland Orchestra, symphony orchestras from Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles Philharmonic, New York Philharmonic

**Debut Rotterdam:** 1990

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## *It is the orchestra that carries most of the story, painting an unruly northern landscape with powerful brush strokes*

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be labelled a traitor by the pro-Sweden dogmatists and, in fact, the controversy only served to increase his fame.

*Kullervo* is based on a tale from the *Kalevala*, the national epic in which many Finns found proof of their historic identity. It is a collection of centuries-old verses (or 'runos') of mostly fairy tales and legends which had already provided inspiration for various composers. However, the tales seemed to have been waiting for Sibelius: more than all his predecessors he presented them in musical form that sounded entirely convincing and authentic. Following on from *Kullervo* the *Kalevala*, and indeed the landscapes of Finland, would have a huge influence on Sibelius' musical palette.

*Kullervo*, the principal character in the tale, is a doomed figure. His whole life is dedicated to wreaking revenge on his uncle, who had massacred his family and taken him into slavery as a child. Having escaped servitude, and in the restless search for surviving family members, *Kullervo* seduces a young woman who turns out to be his sister, thought to be dead. In a frenzy he kills his uncle and entire retinue, and then throws himself upon his own sword.

### **Northern palette**

The denouement aside, the story is rather static, but this only adds to the heavy atmosphere of threat. This

chimes perfectly with Sibelius' talent for creating atmosphere; he simply did not have the temperament for fast action and flashy music. In the third and fifth movements a choir provides commentary to the unfolding tale; in the third movement a baritone and mezzo-soprano give first-hand accounts of the fatal love between *Kullervo* and his sister. However, it is the orchestra that carries most of the story, painting an unruly northern landscape with powerful brush strokes.

Even in this early work, Sibelius is finding his own voice.

Characteristically, he lets the woodwind section dominate at moments when German and Russian composers would ramp up their musical fairy tales with heavy brass. The metallic fire power of a Wagner opera may be impressive, but Sibelius' velvety sound from the flute and oboe are just as suggestive and seem closer to nature, often taking the form of a repeated, bird-song like ostinato such as the strange, slightly unsettling oboe motif in the Introduction.

Equally characteristic are the unexpected turns in the musical journey. Melodies end abruptly to make way for other ideas, which gives the music a certain urgency and tension – yet without disrupting an overall cohesion, since all motifs seem to be connected or are developed from each other.

### **Expansive horizon**

There are imbalances in *Kullervo* that Sibelius would later learn to skilfully avoid. The middle movement is almost twice the length of the other movements, and some of the repetition serves to weaken, rather than strengthen, the whole. Nevertheless, with every performance the same question arises: how could a relatively inexperienced composer have written a work that exudes such authority? Clearly he made optimum use of his expansive musical horizon. It was the *Kalevala* that had recently awakened him. At the same time, whilst studying in Vienna, he had been overwhelmed by the music of Anton Bruckner, whose influence – slow movements and elongated, organ-like bass notes – are recognisable features of *Kullervo* and, later on, of his symphonies. And, above all, there was the traditional runo singing of oral poet Larin Paraske, a source of inspiration that Sibelius was always rather secretive about. Whilst working on *Kullervo* he visited Paraske in a remote region of Finland, where she sang for him a number of centuries-old songs with an almost hypnotic effect. How could a composer resist such an experience?

### **Michiel Cleij**



Photo Heilli Tuuli

### **Helena Juntunen, Soprano**

**Born:** Kiimiki, Finland

**Education:** Oulu Conservatorium with Airi Tokola; Sibelius Academy with Anita Vätkki

**Awards:** Lappeenranta Singing Competition (2002), Karita Mattila prize (2006)

**Breakthrough:** 2002, as Marguerite in Gounods *Faust* during the Savonlinna Opera Festival

**After:** Finnish National Opera, Opéra National de Lyon, La Monnaie Brussels, Theater an der Wien, State Opera Dresden, Opéra National du Rhin, Festival d'Aix en Provence, Wiener Festwochen

**Soloist with:** Royal Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, Antwerp Symphony Orchestra, Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

**Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic:** 2019



### **Tommi Hakala, Baritone**

**Born:** Riihimäki, Finland

**Education:** Sibelius Academy Helsinki; State Academy of Music, Karlsruhe

**Awards:** eerste prijs Merikanto Competitie Finland (2001)

**Breakthrough:** 2003, after winning the BBC Singer of the World Award at the International Singing Competition Cardiff

**Opera Houses:** Finnish National Opera, State Theater Nuremberg, Opera Leipzig

**Opera Roles:** Count Almaviva in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Germont in *La Traviata*, Chorèbe in *Les Troyens*, Rodrigo in *Don Carlo*, Wotan in *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, title role in *Don Giovanni*

**Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic:** 2021



Photo Timo Mokkila

### **UJ Male Voice Choir, Chorus**

**Established:** 1883 in Helsinki by P. J. Hannikainen under the name Ylioppilaskunnan Laulajat (Helsinki University Chorus)

**Current conductor:** Pasi Hyökki

**Members:** 60 male voices, tenors, baritones, basses

**Specialization:** choir music of Jean Sibelius; choral music in Finnish language

**Repertoire:** choral music from different eras: from a capella repertoire to large symphonic repertoire

**Premieres:** more than a hundred works in the 135 years of existence; recent: choral music by Einojuhani Rautavaara

**Concerts with:** Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Konzerthaus Orchestra Berlin, Minnesota Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra Mexico

**Debut Rotterdam Philharmonic:** 2019

# AGENDA

**Sun 14 November 2021 • 14.15**

conductor **Jukka-Pekka Saraste**  
soprano **Helena Juntunen**  
baritone **Tommi Hakala**  
**Sibelius** Orchestral Songs  
**Sibelius** The Bard  
**Sibelius** Lemminkäinen Suite

**Wed 1 December 2021 • 14.00  
and 16.00**

**Sint Sing-Along (3+)**  
members of the Rotterdam  
Philharmonic Orchestra  
together with **Hofplein Rotterdam**  
**Sinterklaas** songs

**Fri 3 December 2021 • 20.15**

conductor **Lahav Shani**  
piano **Yuja Wang**  
**Rachmaninoff** Piano Concerto No. 2  
**Berlioz** Symphonie fantastique

**Fri 17 December 2021 • 19.30**

**Sat 18 December 2021 • 19.30**

**Sun 19 December 2021 • 13.30**

conductor **Jonathan Cohen**  
soprano **Emöke Baráth**  
counter tenor **Andreas Scholl**  
tenor **Andrew Staples**  
baritone **Matthew Rose**  
choir **Groot Omroepkoor**  
**Handel** Messiah

**Wed 29 December 2021 • 13.15  
and 15.00**

**Thu 30 December 2021 • 13.15  
and 15.00**

**The Nutcracker (4+)**  
conductor **Adam Hickox**  
actors **Eric Jan Lens, Christiaan  
Koetsier** and **Sanne Franssen**  
scenography **Kathelijne Monnens** and  
**Cynthia Borst**  
staging **Fons Merkijs**  
**Tchaikovsky** The Nutcracker (selection)

# MUSICIANS

## Chief conductor

Lahav Shani

## Honorary Conductor

Valery Gergiev  
Yannick Nézet-Séguin

## First violin

Igor Gruppman, and  
concertmaster  
Marieke Blankestijn,  
concertmaster  
Quirine Scheffers  
Hed Yaron Meyerson  
Saskia Otto  
Arno Bons  
Mireille van der Wart  
Shelly Greenberg  
Cor van der Linden  
Rachel Browne  
Maria Dingjan  
Marie-José Schrijner  
Noëmi Bodden  
Petra Visser  
Sophia Torrença  
Hadewijch Hofland  
Annerien Stuker  
Alexandra van Beveren  
Koen Stapert

## Second violin

Charlotte Potgieter  
Cecilia Ziano  
Frank de Groot  
Laurens van Vliet  
Tomoko Hara  
Elina Staphorsius  
Jun Yi Dou  
Bob Bruyn  
Letizia Sciarone  
Eefje Habraken  
Maija Reinikainen  
Sumire Hara  
Wim Ruitenbeek  
Babette van den Berg  
Melanie Broers

## Viola

Anne Huser  
Roman Spitzer  
Maartje van Rheeden  
Galalah Samson  
Kerstin Bonk  
Lex Prummel  
Janine Baller  
Francis Saunders  
Veronika Lénártová  
Rosalinde Kluck  
León van den Berg

## Cello

Emanuele Silvestri  
Joanna Pachucka  
Daniel Petrovitsch  
Mario Rio  
Gé van Leeuwen  
Eelco Beinema  
Carla Schrijner  
Pepijn Meeuws  
Yi-Ting Fang

## Double bass

Matthew Midgley  
Ying Lai Green  
Jonathan Focquaert  
Robert Franenberg  
Harke Wiersma  
Arjen Leendertz  
Ricardo Neto

## Flute

Juliette Hurel  
Joséphine Olech  
Désirée Woudenberg

## Oboe

Remco de Vries  
Karel Schoofs  
Hans Cartigny  
Anja van der Maten

## Oboe/cor anglais

Ron Tijhuis

## Clarinet

Julien Hervé  
Bruno Bonansea  
Jan Jansen

## Clarinet/ bass clarinet

Romke-Jan Wijmenga

## Bassoon

Pieter Nuytten  
Marianne Prommel

## Bassoon/ contra bassoon

Hans Wisse

## Horn

David Fernández  
Alonso  
Wendy Leliveld  
Richard Speetjens  
Laurens Otto  
Pierre Buizer

## Trumpet

Giuliano Sommerhalder  
Alex Elia  
Simon Wierenga  
Jos Verspagen

## Trombone

Pierre Volders  
Alexander Verbeek  
Remko de Jager

## Bass Trombone/ contrabass trombone

Ben van Dijk

## Tuba

Hendrik-Jan Renes

## Timpani/ percussion

Randy Max  
Danny van de Wal  
Ronald Ent  
Martijn Boom  
Adriaan Feyaerts

## Harp

Charlotte Sprenkels