

PROGRAMMHEFT



An English version of this programme booklet can be found at
www.polyphonia.ch/en/konzert

Winter Concert 2024

University Orchestra Polyphonia Zürich

Maruja Laukas, Violin
Leon Felix Schlagintweit, Direction

Wednesday, 11. December 2024
19:30 , Kirche Neumünster Zürich

Tuesday, 17. December 2024
19:30 , Konservatorium Zürich, grosser Saal

PROGRAM

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Finlandia op. 26

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957)

Violin Concerto in D minor op. 47

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Adagio di molto
- III. Allegro, ma non tanto

Break

Johan Svendsen (1840–1911)

Ouverture to Sigurd Slembe op. 8

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907)

Symphonic Dances op. 64

- I. Allegro moderato e marcato
- II. Allegretto grazioso
- III. Allegro giocoso
- IV. Andante - Allegro molto e risoluto

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Jean Sibelius

Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) is one of the most influential composers of Finland and is a central figure of classical Nordic music. Born in December of 1865 in the small town of Hämeenlinna. He already showed his musical talent at a young age, especially with the violin before he turned to composing. His studies led him from Helsinki via Berlin to Vienna where he developed his distinct style, characterized by the nature of his homeland and influenced by the romantic era.

Finlandia op. 26: Expression of National Identity

Finlandia is one of the most well known and important pieces by Sibelius. It was written in 1899 during a period full of political tension between Finland and the tsardom of Russia. In this time Russia strengthened its ambitions to gain complete control over Finland and suppress Finnish culture. Finlandia was originally part of a patriotic music suite that was performed during an event promoting the freedom of press. To circumvent the censorship of the Russian government, the piece was first given different titles until it received its final name after the Finnish independence in 1917.

Finlandia starts with gloomy and mighty brass chords that represents the threat to the Finnish freedom. After this dark opening follows an energetic, combative motive that embodies the resistance and determination of the Finnish people. The dramatic course of this piece culminates finally in the famous Finlandia anthem. This simple and uplifting melody that was provided with a text later on, emits confidence and hope. It became a symbol of national unity and freedom for many Finns. To this day it is seen as the unofficial national anthem of Finland.



Edition of the newspaper Uusi Suometar from 1.11.1899 with an announcement for the premiere of Finlandia at an event on nationalistic topics

Violin Concerto in D minor op. 47: A Conversation with Nature

The *Violin concerto in D minor op. 47*, created between 1903 and 1905, is one of the most famous concertos for violin ever written. The premiere of the first version took place 1904 in Helsinki but due to the critical stance of the audience and the attending musicians, Sibelius revised the concert. The final version was first played 1905 in Berlin under the direction of Richard Strauss and it became an international success. The violin concerto is characterized by a unique mixture of virtuosity and emotional depth.



Jean Sibelius in 1890.

Photograph by Daniel Nyblin.

The first movement *allegro moderato* begins with a mysterious sound that sets the tone for the lyrical and melancholic melody of the solo violin. The atmosphere is reminiscent of a Nordic winter's night where the snow is illuminated by starlight. Already, Sibelius deep connection to the Finnish nature becomes apparent through the different melodies and the sound colors used in the piece. In the course of the first movement, Sibelius shows his talent for seamlessly combining dynamic, technical difficulty but also musical expressiveness to form a unique atmosphere that shows a fascinating depth in particular through his use of nested rhythms.

In the second movement *Adagio di molto* a tender, nearly elegiac melody develops that is accompanied by an underlying syncopated rhythm. The slow movement creates an intimate, thoughtful mood that represents the silent beauty of the Finnish seas and forests. The solo violin shows loneliness and emotional depth while the orchestra calmly accompanies with a touching sound.

In the energetic third movement *Allegro, ma non tanto* the main focus is on the virtuosity of the solo violin. The rapid passages up and down the neck together with the rhythmic accents are often compared to a wild dance - another symbol for the untamed nature of the north. Here the orchestra is not just simply accompanying, it acts as a rhythmic partner that pushes and supports the solo violin. The movement leads to a captivating, triumphant build up that ends the concerto in a striking climax.

Sibelius' Legacy

Jean Sibelius created with *Finlandia* and his violin concerto two masterpieces that express not only the Finnish identity but also the universal power of music. In *Finlandia* we can hear the resistance and the strive for freedom of a whole nation. On the other hand, the violin concerto captures the connection between humans and nature musically in a poetic fashion. Sibelius' ability to combine virtuosity, connection to nature and emotional expressions into a coherent piece makes him one of the central figures of the late romantic period and his influence extends far beyond the borders of Finland.

Isabelle Bühler



Sea in the region of Hämeenlinna, the hometown of Sibelius

Johan Svendsen - Overture to Sigurd Slembe op. 8

Johan Svendsen (1840–1911) was a Norwegian composer and conductor who, alongside Edvard Grieg, was one of the most respected musicians in Norway at his time. After his studies at the Konservatorium in Leipzig he worked in Germany and Scandinavia until he was asked in 1833 to become the conductor of the royal opera in Kopenhagen. In his works Svendsen connected the European musical traditions with Nordic sound languages and thus became one of the pioneers of Scandinavian romanticism. He was considered a master of orchestration and was often praised for his colorful soundscapes.



*Johan Svendsen,
Photograph by Claus Knudsen.*

The *Overture to Sigurd Slembe* was composed as the musical introduction to the unfinished opera *Sigurd Slembe*. Based on the trilogy with the same name by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the opera tells the story of the historic figure Sigurd Slembe, a Norwegian prince from the 12th century who tried to become the Norwegian king through intrigue and fights. In the end it was all in vain. While Svendsen's opera never got finished, he still worked in the turmoil and the dramatic essence of the protagonist into this overture.

The main theme of this piece is characterized by a gloomy mood that emerges in many different parts of the orchestra and that is also changed and varied during the piece. Svendsen shows his ability to generate dramatic tension through chromatic increments as well as his finesse at developing themes using counterpoints. Delicate and lyrical passages are contrasted by heroic themes. This should give the listener an idea of the inner thoughts of Sigurd Slembe. On one hand he has his determination to fight but on the other hand he also grows more distant to the people around him, becoming lonely inside.

The *overture to Sigurd Slembe* is one of Svendsen's earlier works and it already shows a rich orchestration that becomes more pronounced in his later works like his symphonies. This piece marks an important step in Svendsen's development as a composer and is an impressive example of his capabilities to create romantic soundscapes.

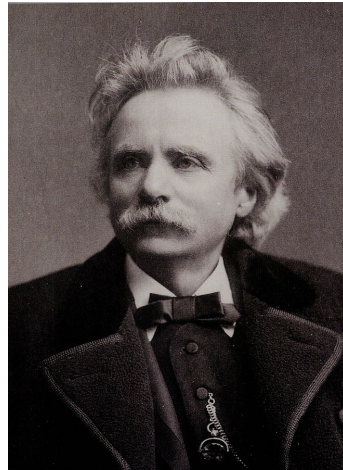
Isabelle Bühler

Edvard Grieg - *Symphonic Dances op. 64*

Edvard Grieg (1843–1907) composed his *Symphonic Dances op. 64* in the year 1896 initially as a piece for piano for four hands. But a letter from Grieg dating back to the 10 April 1897 shows that it was intended for orchestra from the very beginning. All four dances are based on melodies from the collection *Older and Newer Norwegian Folk Songs* that were published between 1854 and 1876 in Norway. Grieg already used these melodies in a few of his earlier works.

As a basis for the first dance Grieg used a *Halling from Valdres*. The *Halling*, together with the *Gangar* and *Springdans* is one of the most important forms of Norwegian folk dances that are traditionally played by the *Hardanger fiddle*. Grieg copies the melody true to the original and implements it at first in a *fortissimo* for the trumpets and french horns. Then, in contrast to this introduction, the melody resounds in a piano through the woodwinds.

The second dance is based on a more calm *Halling* called *The Horse Trader*. The piece starts with a beautiful melody played by the oboe, accompanied by a harp and the lower strings. In the middle



Edvard Grieg, around 1880

part Grieg uses a motif he already used in his *Concert for Piano and Orchestra in A Minor*. First played by the clarinet and then developed by the oboe. The motif is made of three descending notes - one semitone followed by a major third - is a staple in Griegs compositions and is sometimes also called the *Grieg-motif*. It has its roots in the characteristic of Norwegian folk music.

For the third movement Grieg uses a *Springdans from Aamot*. This piece begins again with the *Grieg-motif*, first in the higher register of the orchestra, the followed by the lower register. After that the oboe presents the melody of the *Springdans* that has some resemblance with a waltz.

In the fourth dance, Grieg uses two more melodies from the collection. After a short introduction the violins play the melody of a folk song with the humorous text *Have you seen my Wife?*. Here, Grieg keeps true to the original melody and doesn't change anything. The calm middle part is characterized by the clarinet and oboe who take turns playing a carried and catchy melody. This melody is called *Bridal Song* in the collection.

If we want to dive into the different works by Grieg, we first have to ask

the question: What makes Grieg's music so special? Gerhard Schjelderup wrote the following in regards to this question:

No artist has loved his home country more passionately than him. No artist has suffered more greatly than him while in a foreign country. And no one could shape this longing and suffering into his music better than Grieg[...]

The Norwegian artist revived the folk music in his compositions. The natural, inner connection between the composer and the folk music is that instinctive, that close and strong that Grieg not only used this in his works directly inspired by folk music. He also subconsciously used his knowledge of folk music in his more classical, free works. His music is an echo of his home country, the soundscape of Norway, full of folk ways, myths and the unique nature of the country. It is the fairyland of his heart. It is dedicated to his home.

Siyi Hua



Lyshornet near Bergen, Painting by Johan Christian Dahl (1836)

MARUJA LAUKAS

Maruja Sina Laukas, violinist, composer and multi instrumentalist was born 1995 in Liechtenstein and grew up in Sargans. She finished her music degree with great success together with Daniel Dodds, Brean Dean and Isabelle van Keulen at the Lucern university of arts. She is part of professional orchestras like the 21st Century Orchestra, the Concentus Rivensis and the Lucern Festival Orchestra. She is also a demanded concert master and soloist. Alone during 2024, she played the Sibelius' violin concerto with four different orchestras in Switzerland as well as outside of it. Another passion of hers is chamber music. She regularly gives concerts as part of the duo DELA with Pierre Delignies.

Concerts lead her to many different countries including Switzerland, Liechtenstein, Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, France, Spain, Denmark, Portugal and Slovenia. She played at famous concert venues like the Casino Bern, the Tonhalle Zurich, the Philharmonie in Cologne, the Stefaniensaal and the KKL.

Her composition of the musical *Die wilden Schwäne* after a fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen was premiered 2014. Further performances were made in 2018. Another piece *Der Klang der Sterne* was played 2014 with the youth orchestra of Chur. For the exhibition *Dialog* by Andri and Herbert Laukas she composed *Sonserosa chroma* (2022). As part of her Masters' degree she composed the solo-duo *Phoenix* (2024) for violin and voice.

As a winner of the Gonzen Kulturpreis and grantee of the Hirschmann Stiftung for excellent students she is always searching for the beauty and God inside of music. Her goal is to be able to touch her audiences heart with her musical tales. In her free time she enjoys swimming under the stars in the Vierwaldstättersee. Marujy is excited to play Sibelius' violin concerto together with the university orchestra Polyphonia Zurich.



LEON FELIX SCHLAGINTWEIT

Leon Felix Schlagintweit was born 1996 in Starnberg near Munich. He received his first violin lessons at age five, one year later his first piano lessons. Since then he plays on both instruments as a soloist as well as a part of chamber music. His violin teachers include Michael Friedrich, Manuel Oswald and Stefan Tarara. He was also part of different orchestras like die Jungen Münchner Symphoniker, the symphonic orchestra of the Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes in Munich, Camerata Academica Zürich, the Akademisches Orchester Zürich as well as the youth orchestra in Thurgau.

He started to conduct in 2015 because of the founding of the university orchestra Polyphonia Zurich which he continues to do until this day with the exception of two semesters in 2018. He received conducting lessons from Franz Schottky, Nil Venditti and Delyana Lazarova. In the beginning of 2020 he was an intern at the norwegian opera in Oslo where he was part of the production of Tchaikovskys *Jewgeni Onegin* (Conductor: Lothar Koenigs). In Spring 2022 Leon Felix Schlagintweit completed his Masters degree in interdisciplinary sciences at ETH Zurich. Since autumn 2022 he studies music theory at the Lucern university of arts and receives conducting lessons from Clemens Heil. In 2023 and 2024 he finished the Allegra Conducting Academy by the conductors Rüdiger Bohn, Ekhart Wycik and Johannes Klumpp.



UNIVERSITY ORCHESTRA POLYPHONIA ZÜRICH

The university orchestra Polyphonia Zürich was founded 2015 by a group of students that were searching for an alternative to the other student orchestras in Zurich that were full. The goal of this new orchestra under the direction of Leon Felix Schlagintweit was to make music regularly. Not with too much stress, but certainly with musical aspirations. The idea found many supporters and since then Polyphonia is a part of the music scene at ETH and UZH and presents a concert program at the end of every semester. For the first time since Polyphonias genesis, the program was chosen by the the new program commission. Because of that it was possible for the rest of the orchestra to choose between different program suggestions which ultimately led to this wonderful combination of nordic pieces.

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Tuba Patrick Schnider

Harp Tinet Ruch

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Subject to change

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The university orchestra Polyphonia Zurich continues to enjoy great popularity. Like every semester we have to rent instruments, finance transport costs, rent concert halls and print a lot of sheet music.

We would be happy if you could also support us in the future: either with a donation after the concert or you can directly contact our sponsoring team(sponsoring@polyphonia.ch).

Thank you very much for your support

Tinet Ruch



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We want to give special thanks to aki (the house of the catholic student community in Zurich). For the last few years, we were allowed to use the rooms of aki completely for free. Not only for the weekly rehearsals but also for many sectionals and sometimes just hanging out in the evening, we are always welcome. In return for providing us with this invaluable service, they have only given us more opportunities to make music: for example at Sunday services in the Liebfrauenkirche or at the aki opening ceremony. Thank you very much for your support.

Save the date: The UO Polyphonia celebrates its 10 year anniversary

Die Csárdásfürstin

Operetta by Emmerich Kálmán

Thursday 22. Mai 2025

Friday 23. Mai 2025

Monday 26. Mai 2025

on each day: 19:30 , Grosser Saal des Konservatoriums Zürich

Musical Direction: Leon Felix Schlagintweit

Staging: Lea Theus

Dramaturgy: Adrienne Walder

Costumes: Roman M. Silberer

Choreography: Christoph Hellings

Singers

Sylva Madeleine Merz

Edwin Dmytro Kalmuchin

Boni Savelii Andreev

Feri Magnus Heimpel

Stasi Irina Laskavaya



UNIVERSITÄTSORCHESTER

Polyphonia

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