

2.10. 2024
WEDNESDAY SERIES³
HELSINKI MUSIC CENTRE AT 19:00

NICHOLAS COLLON
CONDUCTOR

EMMA MALI
VIOLIN

LAURA VIKMAN
VIOLIN

Johannes Brahms
Tragic Overture, Op. 81

15 min

Allegro ma non troppo – Molto più moderato – Tempo primo ma tranquillo

Eugène Ysaÿe
Amitié for two violins and orchestra, Op. 26

16 min

INTERVAL 20 MIN

Ludwig van Beethoven

Symphony No. 6 in F

1. Awakening of cheerful feelings on arrival in the countryside.

Allegro ma non troppo

2. Scene by the brook. Andante molto mosso

3. Merry gathering of country folk. Allegro

4. Thunder, storm. Allegro

5. Cheerful and thankful feelings after the storm. Allegretto

Interval at about 19.40. The concert will end at about 20.45. Broadcast live on Radio 1 and Yle Areena and, delayed from 20:00, on Yle Teema.

JOHANNES BRAHMS: TRAGIC OVERTURE, OP. 81

The *Tragic Overture* was one of the two overtures composed by Johannes Brahms (1833–1897) in summer 1880. He told his biographer Max Kahlbeck, “one laughs while the other cries”. The one that laughed was the *Academic Festival Overture*, Op. 80, with its rousing student songs, whereas “the one that cries” was born of a personal need and Brahms’s pessimistic outlook on life. He did not indicate what the overture was about; some say it could have been inspired by Goethe’s *Faust*, or by *The Birth of Tragedy* published by Nietzsche in 1872.

Brahms may have had private reasons for his pessimism, but it also reflects the historical change taking place at the time as the idealism of the Romantic era began to look increasingly unfounded in the light of the newer, harsher reality.

Rather, the monumental overture wrestles with musical more than literary ideas. Beethoven is most obviously hovering in the background, right from the two thumping opening chords. The second theme offers a momentary respite, but if anything, the flashes of sunlight tend more to underline the transient nature of happiness.

The formal construction, sonata form, emphasises the feeling of inevitability, the belief in fate of the ancient Greek tragedies. The closing chords totally extinguish even the last sparks of hope. Meanwhile, the overture exudes an understanding of human woe and weakness.

EUGÈNE YSAÏE: AMITIÉ, OP. 26

Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931) was Belgian and one of the greatest ever violinists. He was a passionate advocator of contemporary music and performed many works both as the soloist and the conductor. Examples here are the violin sonata dedicated to him as a wedding present by César Franck and many works by Debussy. His own compositions reflect not only his brilliant technique but also a bold and cultivated musician. The works by him most often performed are his six solo sonatas, which he dedicated to other star violinists.

Amitié for two violins and orchestra is literally about friendship, and it is one of the concerto-like tone poems he composed over the years. He dedicated it to

Théodore Lindenbaum, editor of the journal *Le Temps*, whom he had got to know in 1878. Lindenbaum also wrote about music and in the 1920s was a champion of, among others, Ravel. Maybe the term ‘friend’ may also be applied to his second wife, Jeannette Dincin; together they gave *Amitié* its premiere performance.

The orchestra begins by painting an impressionistic background, against which the friendship is born, grows and blossoms. “Thoughts fly free and one lets them wander through a vast field of varied and happy memories,” said Ysaÿe.

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN: SYMPHONY NO. 6 IN F

The Walt Disney animation *Fantasia* (1940) uses the *Pastoral Symphony* by Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) to illustrate loved-up centaurs, Pegasus and babies, wine-slurping country folk and the chief god Zeus firing lightning bolts at them. Beethoven distanced himself from any concrete illustration, however, saying that the work was “more an expression of feelings than tone painting”.

In summer 1808, Beethoven went hiking in the area around Heiligenstadt. At around this time he also read the book *Reflections of the Works of God in Nature* by Christoph Christian Sturm and underlined the paragraph: “In every respect, the study of nature is profitable; with propriety it may be called a school for the heart; seeing it, in a certain sense, teaches us the duty we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves.” The cry “Back to Nature” ascribed to Rousseau had already been heard in the mid-18th century.

The first movement describes precisely this. The whole symphony may be conceived of as one big crescendo in which the first three sections follow one another without a break, introducing more and more instruments as they proceed.

The second movement is a rippling brook over which the first violin and woodwinds embroider a charming ornamental weave. The movement ends with a quasi-cadenza for flute (a nightingale), oboe (a quail) and two clarinets (cuckoos).

Country folk enter the scene in the Scherzo. According to Beethoven's secretary, Schindler, it is a parody of the Mödling village orchestra for which Beethoven had composed some dances. The middle trio section is a wild, twirling country dance for which trumpets join the orchestra. The third repeat of the dance is interrupted by a cleverly-constructed thunderstorm, in what is above all a virtuosic orchestral number. The point Beethoven wishes to make is that Nature demonstrates its might just when mere mortals are concentrating on enjoying themselves without a care in the world.

The shepherds' song is a conventional symbol of man and Nature in harmony. The modestly varied melody and the dynamic wave-like movement represent the timeless quality of the natural round.

*Programme notes by Antti Häyrynen
translated (abridged) by Susan Sinisalo*

23

NICHOLAS COLLON

British Nicholas Collon is one of the most sought-after and most celebrated conductors of the younger generation. He began as Chief Conductor of the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra in August 2021, a post he will hold until the summer of 2028.

Seasonal themes are an important feature of Collon's programming. For the 2024/2025 season he has chosen Paris – City

of Light, Lara Poe the composer, and soloists from the orchestra's own ranks.

Founder (in 2004) and Principal Conductor of the British Aurora Orchestra, Collon has also been working with the Residentie Orkest in The Hague since 2016 – initially sharing the post with Jan Willem de Vriend 2018–2021 and since then as the orchestra's sole Principal Conductor. He has been Prin-

cipal Guest Conductor of the Gürzenich Orchestra in Cologne since autumn 2017.

The many top orchestras guest conducted by Collon have included the front-line British ones, as the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra and the BBC Philharmonic, the Tonhalle Orchestra Zurich, the Orchestre National de France, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Vienna, Danish and Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestras, and the Minnesota Orchestra.

Collon's extensive repertoire also includes opera. He has conducted over 200 new works, both world and country premieres, by composers such as Unsuk Chin, Philip Glass, Colin Matthews, Nico Muhly, Olivier

Messiaen, Krzysztof Penderecki and Judith Weir.

During the 2023/2024 season, the FRSO under Collon recorded works by Lindberg, Sibelius and Strauss. The disc *Road Trip* (Ives, Copland, Adams and Muhly) he made with the Aurora Orchestra won the prestigious Echo Klassik Award for 'Klassik Ohne Grenzen' in 2015. The Aurora Orchestra's first release on the Deutsche Grammophon label was *Music of the Spheres* (Mozart, Max Richter, Adès, Dowland/Muhly and Bowie) in 2020. Collon has also recorded works by Haydn, Ligeti, Britten and Delius, and with the Hallé Orchestra several discs of modern repertoire.

EMMA MALI

24

Emma Mali has played principal 2nd violin in the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra since autumn 2023. She had, however, ties with the orchestra ever since her appearance at its concert of young soloists in 2015. Before taking up her present position she had studied with Mi-Kyung Lee at the University of Music and Theatre Munich and with Pekka Kauppinen and Réka Szilvay at the Sibelius Academy. As a child, she had

already developed an interest in music of the Baroque, and in 2021 studied Baroque violin with Minna Kangas at the Sibelius Academy. In addition to her orchestral work, Emma hopes to engage in further study of Baroque violin and many aspects of chamber music. She plays a Matteo Goffriller violin from 1725 owned by the Yle Pension Foundation.

LAURA VIKMAN

Laura Vikman, co-principal 2nd violin, has been with the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra since 2013, has had guest solo engagements with orchestras both in Finland and abroad and, with the Tempera Quartet of which she is leader, appeared not only in Finland but also in Japan and across Europe. Tempera's discography includes the complete Sibelius string quartets on the BIS

label. A graduate of the Sibelius Academy, Laura also studied in Vienna and Cologne. She has been the winner of the second prize in the Kuopio Violin Competition and the J.S. Bach Competition in Leipzig. With pianist Marianna Shirinyan she also took the second prize in the Vittorio Gui Chamber Music Competition in Florence. Laura also teaches, and she plays an Amati violin owned by the Yle Pension Foundation.