



# 74TH SEASON OF CONCERTS

OCTOBER 23 - 25, 2015 • NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART



# CELEBRATION



Jean Sibelius (undated),  
courtesy the Finnish Museum  
of Photography



Carl Nielsen photographed  
in 1908 by Georg Lindstrøm,  
courtesy Wikipedia

## Three concerts honoring the 150th anniversaries of Jean Sibelius and Carl Nielsen

Finnish violinist and composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957) is perhaps the most important composer associated with nationalism in music and one of the most influential in the development of the symphony and the symphonic poem. Widely recognized as his country's national composer, he is often credited for supporting the rise of the Finnish national identity in the country's struggle for independence.

Sibelius studied at the Finnish Normal School, the first Finnish-speaking school in Russian-held Finland. There he came into contact with Finnish literature and in particular with the *Kalevala*, the mythological epic of Finland, which remained a constant source of inspiration for him. The core of Sibelius's oeuvre is his set of seven symphonies. He used each symphony to develop further his own personal compositional style. Unlike Beethoven, who used the symphonies to make public statements, and who reserved his more intimate feelings for his smaller works, Sibelius released his personal feelings in the symphonies. His works continue to be performed frequently and are often recorded.

Sibelius composed prolifically until the mid-1920s, but after completing his *Seventh Symphony* (1924), the incidental music to *The Tempest* (1926), and the tone poem *Tapiola* (1926), he failed to produce any major works in his last thirty years, a stunning and perplexing decline commonly referred to as "The Silence of Järvenpää," the location of his home. However, he did attempt to continue writing, including abortive efforts on an eighth symphony. In later life, he wrote Masonic music and re-edited some earlier works while retaining an active but not always favorable interest in new developments in music.

Carl August Nielsen (1865–1931) was a Danish violinist and conductor, and widely recognized as Denmark's foremost composer. Brought up by poor but musically talented parents on the island of Funen, he demonstrated his musical abilities at an early age. Nielsen studied at the Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen from 1884 to 1886, and was a violinist in the court orchestra at Copenhagen intermittently from 1886 to 1905. He premiered his *Suite for Strings*, opus 1, in 1888, at the age of twenty-three. The following year, Nielsen began a sixteen-year stint as a second violinist in the prestigious Royal Danish Orchestra under the conductor Johan Svendsen, during which he played in Giuseppe Verdi's *Falstaff* and *Otello* at their Danish premieres. He subsequently served as Kapellmeister at the Royal Theatre and conductor of the Copenhagen Musical Society, and from 1915 he taught at the Royal Conservatory, where he became director in 1931, shortly before his death.

Romanticism influenced Nielsen's early music, but his later style is a powerful fusion of chromatic and often dissonant harmony, solid contrapuntal structure, concentrated motivic treatment, and bold extensions of tonality with frequent polytonal passages. Although his symphonies, concertos, and choral music are now internationally acclaimed, Nielsen's career and personal life were marked by many difficulties, often reflected in his music. He is especially noted for his six symphonies, his *Wind Quintet*, and his concertos for violin, flute, and clarinet. Nielsen's sixth and final symphony, *Sinfonia semplice*, was written in 1924-1925. He died from a heart attack six years later, and is buried in Vestre Cemetery, Copenhagen.

Nielsen maintained the reputation of an outsider during his lifetime, both in his own country and internationally. It was only later that his works firmly entered the international repertoire, accelerating in popularity from the 1960s through Leonard Bernstein and others. In Denmark, Nielsen's reputation was sealed in 2006, when the Ministry of Culture listed three of his compositions as amongst the twelve greatest pieces of Danish music.

# OCTOBER 23

## 12:10 • West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art String Quartet

Claudia Chudacoff, violin

Teri Lazar, violin

Osman Kivrak, viola

Marion Baker, cello

Jean Sibelius

*String Quartet in D Minor*, op. 56, "Voces intimae" (Intimate Voices)

Andante; Allegro molto moderato

Vivace

Adagio di molto

Allegretto ma pesante

Allegro

*Vattendroppar* (Raindrops)

*Duo in C Major*

Carl Nielsen

*String Quartet No. 1*

Allegro energico

Andante amoroso

Allegro molto

Allegro inquieto

## The Musicians

The National Gallery of Art String Quartet has performed regularly at the Gallery since its debut in 1995. In addition to standard quartet repertoire, the group presents rarely heard masterpieces of chamber music. Also known as the Sunrise Quartet, founded in 1991 and based in Washington, DC, the ensemble has given concerts at the Kennedy Center, the National Building Museum, the Corcoran Museum, the Phillips Collection, the Mozart Festival at the World Bank, and the Chautauqua Festival at Dickinson College. They have completed a Chamber Music America residency at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, where they performed concerts and coached music students.

The quartet has performed with pianists Menahem Pressler and Míceál O'Rourke and with guitarists Roland Dyens and Carlos Barbosa-Lima. It has collaborated with pianist and composer Jessica Krash in the world premiere of her new piano quintet titled, *Be Seeing You*, commissioned by the National Gallery of Art and the National Museum of Women in the Arts. West Virginia Public Television and Chinese National Television have featured the Sunrise Quartet with the group Music from China in a one-hour TV show *A Musical Bridge to China*. In 2011, the quartet traveled to Quito, Ecuador, where they performed three concerts at the International Musica Sacra Festival. The group has performed new music concerts for the Capital Composers Alliance, the Sonoklect Festival at Washington and Lee University, the Contemporary American Theater Festival at Shepherd College, and the Turkish Embassy.

## Program Notes

Although Sibelius was a prolific composer of chamber music, most of his quartets and trios remain outside the standard repertoire, regarded as a light style for practical entertainment. The clear exception is his masterful *String Quartet in D Minor*, written in 1909 when he was forty-four years old. The subtitle "Intimate Voices" comes from an inscription over the staff in the third movement and its meaning remains cryptic. Author Melvin Berger has written that Sibelius was not fond of talking about "meaning" in his music. Sibelius himself once said, "You know how the wing of a butterfly crumbles at a touch? So it is with my compositions; the very mention of them is fatal."

The quartet begins with an intimate exchange between violin and cello with a mournful, lonely melody that immediately establishes an introspective cast. The full ensemble joins, spinning out a long theme in smooth, step-wise motion that weaves long swatches of contrapuntal fabric in loose imitative threads eventually unified by strong, conclusive cadences. This tendency for elongated, spacious polyphony surfaces again in the finale giving a kind of symmetry to this five-movement work.

The brief, transitional second movement is a bright vivace with a bristling motion in the manner of a scherzo. Sibelius seems to exercise one of his unique devices for revealing his theme over time, so that it emerges only towards the end, as if out of freshly formed matter. The deep, central movement of the work is where Sibelius wrote the phrase "voces intimae" over three distinctive muted chords. In the fourth movement, the scherzando character returns, with a more pronounced folk-dance pattern, though the tonality is dark and restless. The finale has a fierce, driving, perpetual motion that surges ever forward. The

swirling, dizzy dance is almost a frantic tarantella with even more nervous tremolos and synaptic sparks jumping among the players. A muscular two-part texture of close cat-and-mouse imitation between treble and base rushes the music into a final cadence that is dark, definitive, and unanimous.

Sibelius wrote his earliest works to be played by family members. Current historians believe that he wrote his first composition, *Vattendroppar* (Raindrops), in the early 1880s. It is a miniature for cello and violin in the style of the Viennese classical school and could be a pizzicato exercise for the composer and his brother Christian, who had started playing the cello. Similarly, the slightly longer and charmingly melodic piece, *Duo*, for violin and viola, was composed around 1886, most likely as an exercise.

From the opening bars of Carl Nielsen's *String Quartet No. 1*, the listener understands that this is not your typical late Romantic string quartet. The composer's four string quartets are trailblazing works, which, long before Bartók began to write his, paved the way for some of chamber music's new developments in the twentieth century. *String Quartet No. 1* was composed during 1887–1888, but did not receive its first public performance until 1898, in the smaller hall at the Odd Fellows Mansion in Copenhagen. Although arranged at short notice, the concert — devoted to works by Nielsen — was well attended. The quartet is the most frequently performed of Nielsen's string quartets, and its successful debut played a key role in his musical career.

Set in four movements, the opening Allegro energico, boldly bursts forth displaying its tonal newness. After this initial tension, the cello introduces a more lyrical secondary theme. The lilting second movement, Andante amoroso, is completely different in style, utilizing traditional melody and harmony. Nothing could be further from this romantic mood than the thrusting Scherzo, Allegro molto, which follows. The main theme is stormy and powerful, but the trio section has a gentle melody over a rustic drone in the cello. The finale, Allegro inquieto (meaning restless), lives up to its designated tempo by starting out in an agitated fashion. The first violin is given a highly dramatic subject, accompanied by off-beat pizzicati in the other voices. The excellent elaboration cleverly uses grace notes and unexpected twists in rhythm. The quartet ends with an exciting coda.

# OCTOBER 24

## 12:10 • West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art Piano Trio

Luke Wedge, violin

Benjamin R. Wensel, violin

Danielle DeSwert Hahn, piano

Meri Siirala, soprano

Carl Nielsen

*Trio in G Major*

I.

II. Andante

III. Allegro grazioso

*Skal blomsterne da visne*

*Æbleblomst*

*Sommersang*

*Hilsen*

*Canto Serioso*

Intermission

Jean Sibelius

*Four Pieces for Violin and Piano*, op. 78

Impromptu

Romance

Religioso

Rigaudon

*Illalle*, op. 17, no. 6

*Vartagen*, op. 61, no. 8

*Säv, säv susa*, op. 36, no. 4

*Norden*, op. 90, no. 1

*Flickan kom ifran sin elsklings mote*,  
op. 37, no. 5

*Trio in C Major*, "Lovisa Trio"

Allegro

Andante

Allegro con brio

## The Musicians

Formed as a resident ensemble in 2008, the National Gallery of Art Piano Trio has since played in numerous Gallery concerts as well as at other venues, where it appears as the West Garden Trio. In 2009, the trio performed a special program at the residence of the Belgian ambassador; in 2010, it played a complete program of music by early twentieth-century American composers in honor of the exhibition *American Modernism: The Shein Collection*; in 2014, it performed a program of lesser-known works by Jewish composers for a Hanukkah concert; and it has regularly contributed piano trios by Mozart to the annual concert in memory of Milton M. Gottesman, which by tradition consists of music by Mozart and J. S. Bach.

## Meri Siirala

In 2008, Soprano Meri Siirala earned a masters in music, receiving the highest grade from the opera department of Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. She debuted as Queen of the Night in a highly acclaimed production of Mozart's *The Magic Flute* by the Pori Opera. She performs regularly as an oratorio soloist and recitalist and works with baroque ensembles and orchestras. She also collaborates with several contemporary composers.

Siirala has received awards and grants for young, promising artists from various organizations. She received an outstanding review in the *Washington Post* for her Embassy Series recital and has performed in France, Switzerland, Canada, Estonia, Norway, Sweden, and the United States.

## Program Notes

Nielsen's *Piano Trio in G* from 1883 was written when the composer was eighteen years old and before he began studies at the conservatory in Copenhagen. This brief piece owes something to the quirkiness of Haydn, whose string quartets he played with local friends in Odense. We hear a forthright, attention-getting chord that is quickly supplanted by a simple, almost banal, melody, which, despite attempts by the chord to assert its prominence, is given a series of charming variations. The remaining two movements are more conventional, but full of good spirits. The piano part is quite flashy, which is odd, given that Nielsen was not trained as a pianist. He started out on the cornet and the trombone and then studied violin in Copenhagen.

While serving as conductor of the Copenhagen Opera Orchestra, Nielsen composed *Canto Serioso* in 1913, when he was forty-eight years old. He originally wrote it as an audition piece for horn, as he wanted to hear how applicants handled "arpeggios, difficult intervals, the tone at the bottom of the register, musical understanding..." He made the transcription for cello in 1944.

To be a violinist was Sibelius's aspiration until his early twenties, at which point he turned toward composition. However, he remained a fine chamber player and showed a thorough understanding of the violin, which helped him financially during World War I, for he was able to produce works suitable for home performance. Among these were his *Four Pieces*, opus 78, for violin and piano. These four pieces impress the listener above all with their pure musicality. The first in the set, "Impromptu," is striking, containing the ruggedness and originality associated with Sibelius's mature compositions. The following piece is the well-known "Romance in F." This virtual "pops" classic is almost fragrant and looks back nostalgically to

a past golden age. The third in the set, "Religioso," is dedicated to the composer's brother and fellow chamber player, Christian, who was recovering at the time from a serious illness. Despite the piece's title, the overall mood is brooding, perhaps on the fragility of existence. Further contrast brings the set to a lively close with "Rigaudon," a piece filled with rapid arpeggios and pizzicato. The title denotes an eighteenth-century French dance, somewhat like a gavotte at polka tempo.

Many of the early chamber music works of Sibelius were written during his boyhood and student years, when he spent several summers at his aunt's home in the seaside town of Lovisa. The *Trio in C Major* dates from his second period in Helsinki, although it was written in Lovisa. This trio probably followed his four earlier trios and shows greater maturity and technical mastery. In the Lovisa trio, he moves away from classical models and into the territory of full-blooded Romanticism. Sibelius did not provide the trio with an opus number, and the work remained unpublished during his lifetime.

Over the years, Nielsen wrote the music for nearly three hundred songs and hymns. In the early days of his compositional career, he had set selected contemporary Danish poems to music. For a long period after the turn of the century, he concentrated on his symphonic and other larger works, but songs returned to his output after he left the Royal Theatre in 1914.

Nielsen was one of the editors of the 1922 publication, *Folkehøjskolens Melodibog* (The Folk High School Songbook), which contained about six hundred melodies intended for communal singing, an integral part of Danish folk culture. The collection was extremely popular and became embedded in the Danish educational system. During the German occupation of Denmark in World War II, mass song gatherings, using these melodies, were part of Denmark's "spiritual rearmament."

Jean Sibelius's long career both started and ended with solo songs. His first published work, *Serenade* (1888), was set to a poem by Johan Ludvig Runeberg. During the early years of his career and until 1918, he composed solo songs fairly regularly, and they are regarded as central to his output. The works are less known internationally because they are in Swedish. In Scandinavia, and especially in Finland, they hold a permanent place in the solo repertoire.

# OCTOBER 25

**3:30 • West Building, West Garden Court**

National Gallery of Art Orchestra

Peter Wilson, guest conductor

Jean Sibelius  
*Andante Festivo*

Sibelius  
*Impromptu for String Orchestra*

Carl Nielsen  
*Andante Tranquillo e Scherzo*

Nielsen  
*Suite for String Orchestra (Kleine Suite), op. 1*  
Prelude  
Intermezzo  
Finale

Intermission

Sibelius  
*Valse triste, op. 44, no. 1*

Sibelius  
*Pelléas & Mélisande, op. 46*  
At the Castle Gate  
Mélisande  
At the Seashore  
Spring in the Park  
The Three Blind Sisters  
Pastorale  
Mélisande at the Spinning-Wheel  
Entr'acte  
The Death of Mélisande

## The Musicians

### National Gallery of Art Orchestra

The National Gallery of Art Orchestra was founded in 1943 by the Gallery's first music director, Richard Bales, who was a conductor and composer. Initially consisting of approximately twenty-five players drawn from the National Symphony Orchestra, the Gallery orchestra has, on some occasions, reached the size and status of a large chamber orchestra. The ensemble has undertaken the full range of chamber and symphonic repertoire during the tenures of Richard Bales and his successor, George Manos, also a conductor and composer. The orchestra notably presented the 1953 premiere of Charles Ives's *Symphony no. 1* under the direction of Richard Bales; the 1990 premiere of Daniel Pinkham's *Symphony no. 4* under George Manos; and the 2007 premiere of John Musto's *Later the Same Evening: An opera inspired by five paintings of Edward Hopper*, under guest conductor Glen Cortese. Other guest conductors who have appeared with the orchestra in recent years include Bjarte Engeset, Vladimir Lande, George Mester, Otto-Werner Mueller, and José Serebrier.

### Peter Wilson

Peter Wilson is a multifaceted violinist and conductor. He serves as music director of Virginia's Richmond Philharmonic and Waynesboro Symphony Orchestras. He is the String Section Commander for "The President's Own" U.S. Marine Band and has performed as a violinist of the White House for more than a quarter century. Highly respected throughout the National Capital Region, he is concertmaster of the American Festival Pops Orchestra and has guest conducted the National Symphony and National Gallery of Art Orchestras. He holds music degrees from Northwestern University and the Catholic University of America, where he earned a Doctor of Musical Arts.

Wilson began his career as concertmaster of the Walt Disney World Orchestra. For twelve years he was a lecturer at Catholic University, teaching conducting and string techniques while serving as resident conductor of the CU Symphony Orchestra. He made his Carnegie Hall debut in 2015 and has appeared as violin soloist with such legendary artists as Rosemary Clooney, Michael Feinstein, Renée Fleming, Bernadette Peters, and John Williams.

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Wilson began his musical training at age two as a violin student of his mother. He later moved to Morgantown, West Virginia, where he became the first musician ever to receive the Governor's Award for Exceptional Achievement in the Arts. In 2008, Wilson was selected to work with Leonard Slatkin in the acclaimed National Conducting Institute. From 2010 to 2013, he served as Music Director of the Youth Orchestras of Fairfax, where he conducted its flagship ensemble, the United Youth Symphony Orchestra. Wilson serves on the faculties of James Madison and George Mason Universities.

## Program Notes

*Andante Festivo* is a single movement composition by Jean Sibelius, originally scored for string quartet in 1922. Featuring the composer's impassioned string writing, the unmistakable, hummable tune was made all the more luscious when he rescored the piece for string orchestra and timpani in 1938. Full-throated and hymnic, this piece is constructed as a smooth, continuous stream of similar melodic phrases that flow into and out of each other. A radio broadcast of the work from January 1, 1939, with Sibelius conducting, is the only recorded example of the composer interpreting one of his own works.

Sibelius did not compose any new music during the last thirty years of his life, yet he arranged several of his piano works for orchestra and often revisited other music he had composed previously, including the *Impromptu for String Orchestra*. It cleverly combines the fifth and sixth piano pieces from the opus 5 set, in E minor and E major, respectively. The outer sections feature the noble and lyrical lines of the Fifth Impromptu, while the gentle waltz feel of the Sixth Impromptu serves beautifully as the central "trio" section of this creative synthesis.

Though Carl Nielsen is world famous for his symphonies, his incidental and program music for orchestra have become some of his most popular works. Nielsen's major subject at the Conservatory of Music may have been violin, but it was clear that composition was his real interest. His official debut as a composer took place after he had left the conservatory, in the Tivoli Concert Hall on 17 September 1887, where his *Andante Tranquillo e Scherzo* for string orchestra was performed (with himself playing the violin in the orchestra). The two movements are probably based on separate string quartet movements that Nielsen had the opportunity to rework for this first public performance. Another of Nielsen's very early works, his *Little Suite for Strings*, was at first a string quintet for two violins, viola, cello, and bass. Nielsen reworked the quintet and added divided parts for the four upper voices so that it became a nonet. It was completed and published in 1888 as his opus 1, although he had already published a number of other works by this time. When this work was premiered that same year, the program notes that accompanied it identified the composer as "Mr. Carl Nielsen, whom nobody knows." The opening Prelude is dark, yet lyrical and elegiac. A graceful, lilting Intermezzo follows, as a light amuse-bouche before the expansive Finale brings back the main theme from the first movement, rounding out the work.

Sibelius achieved his greatest popularity with *Valse triste*, a sad waltz that he composed for a play called *Death*, written by his brother-in-law Arvid Järnefelt. Sibelius wrote the piece during a period of heavy drinking and low income. Järnefelt's play was unsuccessful, but a year later Sibelius salvaged one of the numbers, reworked it, and called it *Valse triste*. These simple but haunting bars were written for a scene in which a woman on her deathbed rises to dance with a series of spectral partners. It is wonderfully evocative of darkness, delirium, and collapse. A few months later, in need of money, Sibelius sold *Valse triste* for only three hundred marks. A couple of years later the work became world famous.

*Pelléas et Mélisande*, the play by Belgian-born Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949) had its premiere in 1893. Within twelve years, four major composers — Claude Debussy, Gabriel Fauré, Richard Strauss, and finally, Jean Sibelius — produced musical interpretations of it. In 1905, Sibelius scored it for a production in Helsinki that ran fifteen performances. In the era of Sibelius’s rise to fame, drama was pivotal to the development of cultural and social attitudes in Scandinavia. The composer was attracted to theater as early as 1893, when he started work on an opera, *The Building of the Boat*. He wrote his first theater score in 1898, and continued to do so until the end of his career. *Pelléas*, though, was the first from which he extracted an orchestral suite. The nine movements do not follow Maeterlinck’s sequence, but still capture its timeless character.

### Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Fourth Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lamot Belin Concerts

Inscape Chamber Orchestra  
Music by Dallapiccola, Górecki,  
Hallman, Scriabin, and Young  
November 1, Sunday, 3:30  
West Building, West Garden Court

David Hardy, cellist  
Lisa Emenheiser, pianist  
Music for cello and piano by  
Britten and Rachmaninoff  
November 8, Sunday, 3:30  
West Building, West Garden Court

United States Army Chorus  
*Songs of the Soldier: A Salute to Veterans*  
Veteran’s Day concert  
November 11, Wednesday, 12:10  
West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art Wind Quintet  
Music by French composers  
Presented in honor of  
*Louise Bourgeois: No Exit*.  
November 15, Sunday, 3:30  
West Building, West Garden Court

National Gallery of Art  
New Music Ensemble  
Music by Morton Subotnick  
Presented in honor of  
*The Serial Impulse at Gemini G.E.L.*  
November 22, Sunday, 3:30  
West Building, West Garden Court

### General Information

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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**Cover** Jacques Villon, *Spanish Dancer (Danseuse Espagnole)* (detail), 1899, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon

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