

Symphony *Series*

4 – Heroic

Fri 3 & Sat 4 May
Adelaide Town Hall



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Symphony *Series*

4

Heroic

Osmo Vänskä
Conductor

Behzod Abduraimov
Piano

—

Duration
2 hrs 15 mins (incl. interval)

Fri 3 & Sat 4 May
Adelaide Town Hall

Beethoven [9']
Egmont: Overture, Op.84

Beethoven [36']
Concerto for Piano No.1 in C, Op.15

I. Allegro con brio

II. Largo

III. Rondo: Allegro

Interval

Sibelius [48']
Lemminkäinen Suite, Op.22

I: Lemminkäinen and the Maidens on the Island

II: The Swan of Tuonela

III: Lemminkäinen in Tuonela

IV: Lemminkäinen's Return

Listen Later ABC Classic is recording this concert for later broadcast. You can hear it again on Monday 13 May at 1pm.

Classical Conversation Join us in the Adelaide Town Hall auditorium one hour before each concert for our free *Classical Conversations* as conductor Osmo Vänskä and Simon Lord, ASO's Director, Artistic Planning discuss the music in tonight's program.



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S O F I T E L
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Welcome



Simon Lord
Director, Artistic Planning

It is my pleasure to welcome you to Symphony Series 4 *Heroic*. It is a program inspired by two eponymous heroes: the great warrior Egmont portrayed by Beethoven, and the mythical Lemminkäinen, as brought to life by Sibelius.

To conduct, in his ASO début, it is an honour to welcome to Adelaide the celebrated Finnish conductor Osmo Vänskä.

Osmo is considered to be our 'greatest living Sibelian' (*The Sunday Times*). His charismatic and insightful interpretations of his fellow countryman's music are characterised by energy, intensity, and drama. Over the past 25 years, Osmo has recorded two highly acclaimed Sibelius symphony cycles: first with the Lahti Symphony Orchestra in Finland and, most recently, with the Minnesota Orchestra in the USA during his long and successful tenure as its Music Director. Today, both cycles are regarded as benchmark recordings. It is a privilege to welcome Osmo to the ASO to conduct music which he lives and breathes.

Tonight presents a rare opportunity for us to journey into the dark, brooding, and magical world of Sibelius's *Lemminkäinen*. In some of the composer's most atmospheric music,

we experience the transcendence of Tuonela's sacred swan, the passion of the seductive maidens from Saari, and the ecstasy of Lemminkäinen's final journey home.

Our soloist this evening is a good friend of the ASO. Uzbek pianist Behzod Abduraimov first performed with our orchestra 10 years ago (he was just 24) in an exuberant performance of Rachmaninov's mighty Third Piano Concerto. We are delighted to welcome Behzod back to Adelaide for the sublime poetry of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto.

Thank you for being with us. I hope that tonight's musical adventure inspires, excites, and enthral's you.

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Osmo Vänskä
Conductor

Conductor Laureate of Minnesota Orchestra, where he held the Music Directorship for 19 years, and Music Director of Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra from 2020-2023, Osmo Vänskä is recognised for his compelling interpretations of repertoire of all ages and an energetic presence on the podium. His democratic and inclusive style of work has been key in forging long-standing relationships with many orchestras worldwide.

Performances of Mahler's Symphony No.8 with Minnesota Orchestra in June 2022 provided a fitting culmination for Vänskä's tenure as Music Director. Together they undertook five major European tours, as well as an historic trip to Cuba in 2015 – the first visit by an American orchestra since the two countries re-established diplomatic relations. They also made a ground-breaking tour to South Africa in 2018 as part of worldwide celebrations of Nelson Mandela's Centenary.

A distinguished recording artist for the BIS label, Vänskä has recorded all of Mahler's symphonies with Minnesota Orchestra. The Fifth Symphony received a Grammy nomination in 2017 for Best Orchestral Performance. Vänskä and Minnesota Orchestra have also recorded the complete symphonies of Beethoven and Sibelius to critical acclaim, winning a Grammy Award for Best Orchestral Performance in 2014 as well as being nominated on several occasions. In 2021 they were voted Gramophone's Orchestra of the Year.



Behzod Abduraimov
Piano

Behzod Abduraimov's performances combine an immense depth of musicality with phenomenal technique and breath-taking delicacy. He performs with renowned orchestras worldwide including Los Angeles Philharmonic, Philharmonia Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, San Francisco Symphony, The Cleveland Orchestra, Orchestre de Paris, Concertgebouworkest, Czech Philharmonic, Vienna Symphony Orchestra, NHK Symphony Orchestra, and Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin with prestigious conductors such as Santtu-Matias Rouvali, Gustavo Dudamel, Semyon Bychkov, Gianandrea Noseda, Juraj Valčuha, Vasily Petrenko and Constantinos Carydis. In recital Behzod has appeared at Carnegie Hall's Stern Auditorium, Queen Elizabeth Hall in London, and Amsterdam's Concertgebouw amongst others.

In January 2024, Behzod's recital album for Alpha Classics was released, featuring works by Ravel and Prokofiev. The album won the Gramophone Editor's Choice award and was named one of the Apple Music 10 Classical Albums You Must Hear This Month. 2021 saw the release of his first recital album for Alpha Classics featuring Mussorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, Behzod began the piano aged five as a pupil of Tamara Popovich at Uspensky State Central Lyceum Tashkent. In 2009, he won first prize at the London International Piano Competition. He studied with Stanislav Ioudenitch at the International Center for Music at Park University, Missouri, where he is Artist-in-Residence.

About the Program

Beethoven (1770–1827)

Egmont: Overture, Op.84

Beethoven (1770–1827)

Concerto for Piano No.1 in C, Op.15

Sibelius (1865–1957)

Lemminkäinen Suite, Op.22

The title of tonight's concert program boasts a dual nature: firstly, it shares the legendary tales of a Finnish folk hero and a Netherlandic count. But equally heroic are the composers behind these works. If we define a hero as someone who is brave, accomplished, and beloved, then Beethoven and Sibelius are up there with the most impressive of them all. Ask anyone today who Beethoven was, and they'll almost certainly be able to recite the four-note motif at the beginning of his Fifth Symphony; they'll tell you he struggled with hearing loss but kept making music anyway. These are some of the most talked-about reasons Beethoven's fame endured throughout history, but he was a hero back in his own day, too – or perhaps an antihero of music, depending on your perspective. During his career, Beethoven challenged the expectations of his audiences and the traditional compositional structures that were established long before he was born into the world of Western Classical music. He learnt the rules, then broke them in the most daring of ways. From his bold creativity came an outpouring of drama that would forever change the scope of orchestral music and its ability to portray the legends of literature and life.

As Beethoven was a hero to music, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was a hero to literature – and the composer certainly admired him as such. His *Egmont* is based on Goethe's 1788 play of the same name. It was commissioned as incidental

music, which means it could provide a kind of background score that would emphasise the moods of this dramatic play. Beethoven's *Egmont* Overture became a standalone piece from this work that contained another nine movements, and it covers the narrative of Goethe's work along with the historical events that inspired it.

Lamoral, Count of Egmont was a real man who lived in the 16th Century, and he's the leading figure of Beethoven's overture. As with many old works of art, *Egmont* – the play and the composition – is imbued with a patriotic spirit. This story is set in the Spanish Netherlands, which in Lamoral's day was ruled by King Philip II of Spain. When Lamoral protested against these leading powers, he was executed for treason. The tragedy of *Egmont* paved the way for the eventual freedom of the Dutch people – and it's the reason Beethoven positions him as a hero, with the overture's elated conclusion signifying an ultimate victory.

The Hero's Journey is one of the most popular storytelling templates: you'll find it in *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings*; in *Jane Eyre* and *The Lion King*. It sets an ordinary person on a quest in which they face challenges along the way before finally returning home a hero. If we consider this journey within the scope of Beethoven's own life, his Piano Concerto No.1 in C would be placed at the beginning: it is the hero's call to adventure in the wild world of music. Written in his early period, it helped establish his career as a concert



Lemminkäinen's Mother
Akseli Gallen-Kallela, 1897

Lemminkäinen is dead after his attempt to kill the Swan of Tuonela. His mother collects his dismembered pieces, puts him back together, and looks up to see a single bee bringing honey from the halls of the god Ukko, a wondrous ointment that would revive her son.

pianist and composer of interest. Unlike the *Egmont* – which echoed political and social pressures weighing heavily on the mind of Beethoven at the time – this concerto is lighter in feel. It was the first piano concerto Beethoven had published, though not the first he had written. It may have dazzled the audience of his day through its orchestral scale and adventurous treatments of elements such as the key, an abrupt finale, and even the cadenza – a solo improvised passage that Beethoven would have performed when he premiered the work to success in the 1790s. With this piano concerto, Beethoven crossed a threshold of his Hero's Journey, and stepped closer towards his fate of changing the game in Classical music.

Like Beethoven, Sibelius was a musical hero who didn't limit himself to tradition. He took liberties with sonata form and the symphony. He became known as the musical voice of his country – so what better source material for his compositions than the Finnish epic *Kalevala*? Sibelius found a great deal of excitement and inspiration in this collection of old folk tales and songs, and used some of the text in his *Kullervo* choral symphony, as well as weaving its stories into his tone poems *Pohjola's Daughter* and *Tapiola*. His *Lemminkäinen* Suite is also a series of tone poems: a stirring form of music that prioritises emotional expression and depictions of a story or scene, often based on works of literature. Sibelius crafted some of his *Lemminkäinen* tone poems in the late 19th Century, but it took another half-century for all four to be published.

In the hungry first movement *Lemminkäinen and the Maidens on the Island*, our protagonist – a kind of Don Juan – finds himself on an island which, much to his delight, appears entirely populated with women! You'll hear some Wagnerian-level yearning in this movement. Of course, the set-up is too good to be true for Lemminkäinen: when the island's men appear, our hero escapes quick-smart, running away with scattered winds and violins! A solo cor anglais plays the title role of *The Swan of Tuonela*, a guardian of death that Lemminkäinen tries to kill. Instead, he is murdered in *Lemminkäinen in Tuonela*, and in a particularly gory manner at that: his body parts are dispersed all over the place! Luckily, his loyal mum saves the day and puts the pieces back where they should be. We may also find the old Hero's Journey structure over the course of this fantastical suite: having faced the trials of his quest – from his erotic temptations to the challenge of killing the swan – our patchwork hero is resurrected, and finally returns home in the closing movement.

Along with Beethoven in the Classical period, and Sibelius in the late Romantic, who are your own beloved heroes of music history?

Stephanie Eslake

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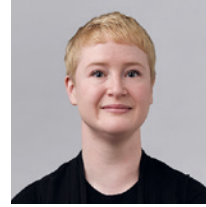
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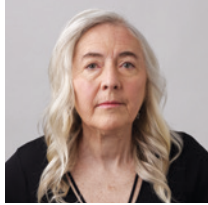
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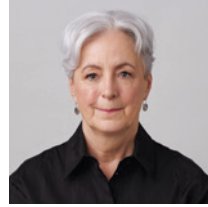
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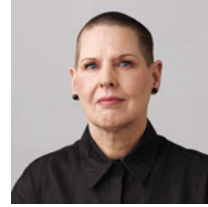
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