ONE HUNDRED TWENTIETH SEASON

Chicago Symphony Orchestra

Riccardo Muti Music Director
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Wednesday, February 23, 2011, at 6:30 (Afterwork Masterworks, performed with no intermission)

Esa-Pekka Salonen Conductor
Leila Josefowicz Violin

Salonen Violin Concerto
Sibelius Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

Thursday, February 24, 2011, at 8:00
Saturday, February 26, 2011, at 8:00

Esa-Pekka Salonen Conductor
Leila Josefowicz Violin

Debussy *Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun*

Salonen Violin Concerto
Mirage—
Pulse I
Pulse II
Adieu

LEILA JOSEFOWICZ

Commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the New York City Ballet

First Chicago Symphony Orchestra performances

INTERMISSION

Sibelius Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43
Allegretto
Andante, ma rubato
Vivacissimo—
Finale: Allegro moderato

These violin concerto performances have been enabled by the Paul Ricker Judy Fund.

Saturday's concert is generously sponsored by Baxter International Inc.

Steinway is the official piano of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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Claude Debussy

Born August 22, 1862, Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France.
Died March 25, 1918, Paris, France.

Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun

The year Debussy returned to Paris from Rome—where he unhappily served time as the reward of winning the coveted Prix de Rome—he bought a copy of Stéphane Mallarmé's *The Afternoon of a Faun* to give to his friend Paul Dukas, who didn't get beyond the preliminary round of the competition. Eventually Dukas would establish his credentials with *The Sorcerer's Apprentice,* but by then, Debussy was already famous for his *Prelude to The Afternoon of a Faun*.

By 1887, Stéphane Mallarmé had begun hosting his famous gatherings every Tuesday evening in his apartment, where his daughter Geneviève served the punch. Debussy sometimes dropped in at 89, rue de Rome (an unfortunate reminder of a city he had happily left) to partake of the punch and the lively exchange of ideas, and in time, he and Mallarmé became friends. In 1898, he was among those first notified of the poet's death.

Mallarmé's poem, *The Afternoon of a Faun,* was published in 1876, in a slim, elegantly bound volume with a line drawing by Edouard Manet on the cover. We don't know when Debussy first thought of interpreting Mallarmé's faun and his dreams of conquering nymphs, nor to what degree he and Mallarmé discussed the prospect. As late as 1891, Mallarmé was still contemplating some kind of dramatized reading of his text, and perhaps Debussy was meant to fit into that scheme. Debussy began sketching his music in 1892. In 1893 and again in 1894, announcements promised "Prélude, interludes et paraphrase finale" for *The Afternoon of a Faun,* but the full orchestral score Debussy finished on October 23, 1894, contained only the prelude.

COMPOSED
1892–October 23, 1894

FIRST PERFORMANCE
December 22, 1894, Paris

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE
November 23, 1906, Orchestra Hall. Frederick Stock conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCE
April 11, 2008, Orchestra Hall. Valery Gergiev conducting

INSTRUMENTATION
three flutes, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two harps, cymbals, strings

CSO RECORDINGS
1976, Sir Georg Solti conducting. London
1990, Sir Georg Solti conducting. London

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME
10 minutes

Mallarmé first heard this music in Debussy's apartment, where the composer played his score at the piano. "I didn't expect anything like this," Mallarmé said. "This music prolongs the emotion of my poem, and sets its scene more vividly than color." The first orchestral performance, on December 22, was an immediate success (despite poor horn playing), and an encore was demanded. Mallarmé was there; he later said that Debussy's music "presents no dissonance with my text: rather, it goes further into the nostalgia and light with subtlety, malaise, and richness."

Revolutionary works of art are seldom granted such instant, easy success. Inevitably, there was some question about the score's programmatic intentions, to which Debussy responded: "It is a general impression of the poem, for if music were to follow more closely it would run out of breath, like a dray horse competing for the grand prize with a thoroughbred."

The music itself seems to have ruffled few feathers, despite the way it quietly, yet systematically, overturns tradition and opens new frontiers in musical language. Toward the end of his life, Maurice Ravel remembered that "it was [upon] hearing this work, so many years ago, that I first understood what real music was." Pierre Boulez would later date the awakening of modern music from Debussy's score.

Saint-Saëns might well have noted how the now-famous opening flute melody, all sinuous curves and slippery rhythms, resembles the most popular melody he would ever write, "Mon coeur s'ouvre a ta voix" (known in English as "My heart and thy sweet voice") from *Samson and Dalila*. But where Dalila's aria is rooted in D-flat major and common time, Debussy's portrait of the faun eludes our attempts to tap our feet or to establish a key; its insistence on the interval from C-sharp to G-natural argues repeatedly against the E major key signature printed on the page.

The whole of the *Prelude* can be considered a series of variations on a single theme, and we can simply listen to the ways it changes, almost imperceptibly, and grows. There's a more conventional middle section in D-flat, urgently lyrical and more fully scored, which raises the music to fortissimo for the only time in the piece and then sinks down again with the sounds of the flute melody.

Debussy uses the orchestra with extraordinary finesse, drawing such rich and provocative sounds from his winds (including three flutes, an english horn, and four horns) that we scarcely notice the absence of trumpets, trombones, and timpani. The only percussion instruments necessary are two antique cymbals, each allotted just five notes apiece—a triumph of artistry over cost-efficiency.

In 1912, Sergei Diaghilev, who would soon create a notorious scandal with Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, produced a ballet from Debussy's music. It was danced and choreographed by the celebrated Nijinsky, who claimed never to have read Mallarmé's text, and who caused a sensation by foisting heavy-duty eroticism on Debussy's delicate score. ■

Esa-Pekka Salonen

Born June 30, 1958, Helsinki, Finland.

Violin Concerto

Esa-Pekka Salonen's new violin concerto has already enjoyed a multifaceted life. Unusually, it was commissioned by two orchestras—the Los Angeles Philharmonic, where Salonen was music director from 1992 to 2009, and the Chicago Symphony, where he has become a frequent guest conductor in recent years—*and* a dance company—the New York City Ballet, which under both its founder, George Balanchine, and its current director, Peter Martins, has an impressive track record of introducing new works, including Stravinsky's *Orpheus* and *Agon*.

The first performance of Salonen's Violin Concerto was given in Walt Disney Concert Hall in April 2009—only days after the score was finished—in the next-to-last program Salonen would lead as the L.A. orchestra's music director (his final concert, a week later, was an all-Stravinsky affair). Although Salonen says it was not intended as a "farewell" concerto, it was the last in a series of major scores of his that he led during his seventeen seasons with the orchestra, including his breakthrough work, the *LA Variations* he completed in 1996.

At the New York City Ballet premiere of the Violin Concerto last June—the danced piece is titled *Mirage,* Salonen's own title for the first movement—there was not only the added dimension of choreography, by Balanchine disciple Martins, but there were also sets designed by the Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava. ("The set looks

COMPOSED
2008–2009

FIRST PERFORMANCE
April 9, 2009, Walt Disney Concert Hall. Leila Josefowicz, violin, with the composer conducting the L.A. Philharmonic

These are the first CSO performances

COMMISSIONED
Los Angeles Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New York City Ballet

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME
32 minutes

INSTRUMENTATION
solo violin, three flutes, piccolo and alto flute, two oboes and english horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet and contrabass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon, two horns, two trumpets, two trombones, timpani, percussion (bass drum, drum set, glockenspiel, tuned gongs, log drum, marimba, tom-toms, vibraphone, tam-tam), harp, celesta, strings

like the halves of a huge, vertically bisected heart, steely but transparent, with elaborately latticed crossrays," wrote Alastair Macaulay in *The New York Times*. "The halves, hinged together, change formation dramatically" for each of the concerto's four movements.) In both the L.A. Philharmonic and New York City Ballet performances, the soloist was Leila Josefowicz, for whom Salonen wrote the piece—he openly calls her a "partner" in the composition process—and who plays it again this week in its Chicago premiere. From the out-of-nowhere fiddling with which it opens to the surprising chord of its final measure (at the New York City Ballet performances, Calatrava's set was suddenly illuminated by prisms of colored light to underline the unexpected harmonic shift at the end), this is music of great virtuosity for orchestra and soloist alike.

Although today Salonen is one of the few major musical figures who is known as both a composer and a conductor of distinction, when he entered the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki in the 1970s, it was to study horn and composition. He enrolled in Jorma Panula's conducting class because he felt that young composers should learn to lead their own works. Composing remained Salonen's focus: in Helsinki, he studied with the visionary Einojuhani Rautavaara, and in the early 1980s, he worked with Niccolò Castiglioni in Milan and in the Finnish Broadcasting Company studios.

After leading an acclaimed performance of Mahler's Third Symphony on short notice in London in 1983, he quickly became an internationally known conductor for whom composing was a sideline. Nearly a decade passed before Salonen found the time to complete another major work. It was with the successful premiere of the *LA Variations* in 1997, written to showcase the Los Angeles Philharmonic, that Salonen at last entered a new and highly productive phase in his composing career. Since then, he has produced nearly one large-scale work each year, including *Insomnia,* which he led here in its American premiere with the Chicago Symphony in 2003, and a piano concerto, which Yefim Bronfman played with our Orchestra under the composer's baton in 2006. This new work for violin and orchestra is only the second full-length concerto in his modestly sized but steadily growing catalog.

Esa-Pekka Salonen on his Violin Concerto

I wrote my Violin Concerto between June 2008 and March 2009. Nine months, the length of human gestation, a beautiful coincidence.

I decided to cover as wide a range of expression as I could imagine over the four movements of the concerto: from the virtuosic and flashy to the aggressive and brutal, from the meditative and static to the nostalgic and autumnal. Leila Josefowicz turned out to be a fantastic partner in this process. She

knows no limits, she knows no fear, and she was constantly encouraging me to go to places I was not sure I would dare to go. As a result of that process, this concerto is as much a portrait of her as it is my more private narrative, a kind of summary of my experiences as a musician and a human being at the watershed age of fifty.

Movement I
Mirage

The violin starts alone, as if the music had been going on for some time already. Very light bell-like sounds comment on the virtuosic line here and there. Suddenly, we zoom in to maximum magnification: the open strings of the violin continue their resonance, but amplified; the light playfulness has been replaced by an extreme close-up of the strings, now played by the cellos and basses; the sound is dark and resonant.

Zoom out again, and back in after a while. The third close-up leads into a recitative. Solo violin is playing an embellished melodic line that leads into some impossibly fast music. I zoom out once again at the very end, this time straight up in the air. The violin follows.

Finally all movement stops on the note D, which leads to . . .

Movement II
Pulse I

All is quiet, static. I imagined a room, silent: all you can hear is the heartbeat of the person next to you in bed, sound asleep. You cannot sleep, but there is no angst, just some gentle, diffuse thoughts on your mind. Finally, the first rays of the sun can be seen through the curtains, here represented by the flutes.

Movement III
Pulse II

The pulse is no longer a heartbeat. This music is bizarre and urban, heavily leaning towards popular culture with traces of (synthetic) folk music. The violin is pushed to its very limits physically. Something very Californian in all this. Hooray for freedom of expression. And thank you, guys!

Movement IV
Adieu

This is not a specific farewell to anything in particular. It is more related to the very basic process of nature, of something coming to an end and something new being born out of the old. Of course, this music has a strong element of nostalgia, and some of the short outbursts of the full orchestra are almost violent, but I tried to illuminate the harmony from within. Not with big gestures, but with light.

When I had written the very last chord of the piece, I felt confused: why does the last chord—and only that—sound completely different from all other harmony of the piece? As if it belonged to a different composition.

Now I believe I have the answer. That chord is a beginning of something new. ■

Jean Sibelius

Born December 8, 1865, Tavastehus, Finland.
Died September 20, 1957, Järvenpää, Finland.

Symphony No. 2 in D Major, Op. 43

The spell of Italy often has a salutary effect on artists from the North. Goethe regularly recommended making the trip to Italy—Mendelssohn took his advice and returned with his *Italian* Symphony. Berlioz toured Italy against his better judgment and ended up staying fifteen months, addicted to the countryside (*Harold in Italy* is the souvenir he brought us). Wagner claimed he got the idea for the opening of *Das Rheingold* in La Spezia on the western seacoast. Tchaikovsky later nursed a broken spirit in Italy and took home his *Capriccio italien,* as untroubled as any music he ever wrote.

Jean Sibelius went to Italy in 1901. Even then his name meant fjords and bitter cold to people who had not yet heard his music. To those who had—in particular the overly popular *Finlandia,* first performed at a nationalistic pageant in 1899—Sibelius was the voice of Finland. But in Italy, Sibelius's thoughts turned away from his homeland, and he contemplated a work based on Dante's *Divine Comedy.* While staying in the sun-drenched seaside town of Rapallo, he toyed with a four-movement tone poem, *Festival,* based on the same "Stone Guest" theme that Mozart had treated in *Don Giovanni.* Nothing ever came of these ideas, but he did begin his Second Symphony, which he finished once back in Finland.

We should not credit Italy alone with the warmth and ease of Sibelius's Second Symphony, for years later he would return there only to write *Tapiola,* the bleakest of all his works. But Sibelius did love Italy (he later admitted it was second only to his native Finland), and his extended stay there in 1901 certainly had a profound effect on Finland's first great composer. His sketchbooks confirm that

COMPOSED
1902

FIRST PERFORMANCE
March 8, 1902, Helsinki, the composer conducting

FIRST CSO PERFORMANCE
January 1, 1904, Auditorium Theatre. Frederick Stock conducting

MOST RECENT CSO PERFORMANCE
February 11, 2006, Orchestra Hall. David Robertson conducting

INSTRUMENTATION
two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba, timpani, strings

APPROXIMATE PERFORMANCE TIME
44 minutes

ideas conceived in Rapallo turn up throughout the Second Symphony, and even Sibelius himself admitted that Don Juan stalks the second movement.

Sibelius is more interesting as a composer than as a nationalist. Ultimately, the qualities that give his music its own quite singular cast—the bracing sonorities and craggy textures, and the quirky but compelling way his music moves forward—are the product of musical genius, not Finnish heritage. It is true that he developed an abiding interest in the *Kalevala,* the Finnish national epic, as a schoolboy, and that he knew, loved, and sometimes remembered his native folk song when writing music. But he did not even learn Finnish until he was a young man (having grown up in a Swedish-speaking household), and his patriotism was fueled not so much by landscape and congenital pride but by marriage into a powerful and politically active family. It is precisely because Sibelius's music is not outwardly nationalistic (of the picture-postcard variety) that it is so profound—specific and evocative, yet also timeless and universal.

The symphony was the most important genre for Sibelius's musical thoughts at a time when the form didn't seem to suit most composers. Strauss, Schoenberg, Stravinsky, and Bartók, for example, all wrote symphonies of various kinds, but their pioneering work was done elsewhere. The one contemporary of Sibelius whose symphonies are played today, Gustav Mahler, took the symphony to mean something quite different. Sibelius and Mahler met in Helsinki in 1907, and their words on the subject, often quoted, suggest that this was the only time their paths would ever cross, literally or figuratively. Sibelius always remembered their encounter:

> When our conversation touched on the essence of symphony, I said that I admired its severity and style and the profound logic that created an inner connection between all the motives. This was the experience I had come to in composing. Mahler's opinion was just the reverse. "Nein, die Symphonie müss sein wie die Welt. Sie müss alles umfassen." (No, the symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.)

Those lines have often been repeated to explain why Mahler's symphonies sprawl and sing, resembling no others ever written, but they are just as useful in seeing Sibelius's point of view. By 1907, Sibelius had fixed his vision on symphonic music of increasing austerity; his Third Symphony, completed that summer, marks the turning point. That same summer, Mahler put the final touches on his Eighth Symphony, scored for eight vocal soloists, chorus, boys' choir, and huge orchestra; taking as its text a medieval hymn and the closing scene from Goethe's *Faust;* and lasting nearly two hours—the work we know as the *Symphony of A Thousand.* Five years earlier, in 1902, the year Sibelius's Second

Symphony was first performed, Mahler had unveiled his third, which lasts longer than Sibelius's first two symphonies combined.

Sibelius's Second Symphony is a bold, unconventional work. We know too many of his later works, and too much later music in general, perhaps, to see it that way, but at the time—the time of Schoenberg's luscious *Transfigured Night,* not *Pierrot lunaire;* of Stravinsky's academic E-flat symphony, not *The Rite of Spring*—it staked out new territory to which Sibelius alone would return. The first movement, like much of his most characteristic music, makes something whole and compelling out of bits and pieces. As Sibelius would later write: "It is as if the Almighty had thrown down the pieces of a mosaic for heaven's floor and asked me to put them together." Heaven's floor turns out to be designed in a familiar sonata form, but this isn't readily apparent. (Commentators seldom agree on the beginning of the second theme, for example.) Certainly any symphony that begins in pieces can't afford to dissect things further in a traditional development section. In fact, for Sibelius, development often implies the first step in putting the music back together. (Once, when asked about these technical matters, Sibelius cunningly chose to speak about "a spiritual development" instead.)

There is true, sustained lyricism in the slow second movement, but that is not how it opens. Sibelius begins with a timpani roll and restless pizzicato strings from which a bassoon tune struggles to emerge. Melody eventually does take wing, but what we remember most is the wonderful series of adventures encountered in the process.

The scherzo is brief, hurried (except for a sorrowful woodwind theme inspired not by Finland's fate, as commentators used to insist, but by the suicide of Sibelius's sister-in-law), and expectant. When, after about five minutes, it leads straight into the broad first chords of the finale, we realize that this is what we were waiting for all along. From there the fourth movement unfolds slowly, continuously, and with increasing power and majesty. It rises and soars in ways denied the earlier movements, and that, of course, is Sibelius's way: heaven's floor visible at last. ■

Phillip Huscher is the program annotator for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

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