

**Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra - Florida Blue Masterwork Series**  
**Friday & Saturday, October 24 & 25, 2014, at 8 p.m.**  
"Words on Music" one hour prior to each Masterworks concert  
Robert E. Jacoby Symphony Hall, Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts

**VIOLIN VIRTUOSITY**

Larry Rachliff, conductor  
James Ehnes, violin\*

Jean  
**SIBELIUS** Violin Concerto in D Minor, op. 47\*  
1. Allegro moderato (D Minor)  
2. Adagio di molto (B-flat Major)  
3. Allegro ma non tanto (D Major)

Intermission

Sergei  
**PROKOFIEV** Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, op. 100  
1. Andante (B-flat Major)  
2. Allegro marcato (D Minor)  
3. Adagio (F Major)  
4. Allegro giocoso (B-flat Major)

**Jean Sibelius**

Finnish composer and conductor

Born: 1865, Tavestehus, Finland; died: 1957, Järvenpää, Finland

**Violin Concerto in D Minor, op. 47**

Composed in 1902-03; revised 1905

Premiered on February 8, 1904, with soloist Viktor Nováčèk and the Helsinki Philharmonic, conducted by the composer

Revision premiered on October 19, 1905, with soloist Karl Halír and Staatskapelle Berlin, conducted by Richard Strauss  
ca. 34 minutes (17', 10', 7')

Apart from saunas, Nokia phones and the *Angry Birds* video game, the music of Jean Sibelius is Finland's most celebrated export, and Sibelius's Violin Concerto is the most-frequently recorded of all 20th-Century works that share the title. But given its inauspicious debut, the concerto's current popularity was hardly a foregone conclusion.

Sibelius was not yet three when his father died of typhus, forcing his pregnant mother to uproot her two (soon to be three) small children and move in with her mother, grandmother, sister and two aunts. It was a musical household, and although the future composer of *Finlandia* displayed no prodigious talent, by age 5 he had begun to amuse himself by improvising on Granny's out-of-tune piano.

Aunt Julia was a piano teacher who gave young Janne his first music training, but he was loath to practice. The turning point came at age 14 when he got his hands on a violin. He was determined to master it and was well on his way, but his relatively late start, growing stage fright, and a shoulder injury during his 20s prevented Sibelius from realizing his adolescent dream of becoming a virtuoso violinist.

His youthful dedication did provide the inspiration and technical expertise to craft his only concerto into one of the most challenging works for violin and orchestra ever penned. Unfortunately, the technical demands proved too great for the concerto's first soloist, and the 1904 premiere was a failure. Sibelius withdrew the concerto to tighten the form, prune some gratuitously-virtuosic solo passages, and lighten some of the orchestral scoring. Despite the improvements, the

reception of the revised version the following year was tepid. The concerto only really caught fire three decades later when Jascha Heifetz added it to his repertoire and recorded it for a 1935 release.

Like Mendelssohn, Sibelius dispenses with an orchestral introduction for his sonata-form first movement. Amid a murmur of muted violins, the soloist emerges as if suspended in a mist, intoning a folk-like melody tinged with a sadness distilled from times long past. A “mini-cadenza” precedes the first orchestral *tutti*, which in turn introduces a transitional theme that morphs into the yearning second subject, presented by the returning soloist in rapturous double-stopped sixths. The orchestral closing section is vigorous and march-like with a folksy finish. The soloist’s “big cadenza” follows, forming the bulk of the development section. The orchestra takes the lead recapping the main themes while the soloist dazzles with bravura commentary, and further development is provided along the way.

The second movement overflows with an expansive, Romantic lyricism unusual in Sibelius's mature works. Despite the “very slow” tempo marking Sibelius manages to test the soloist's virtuosity, especially in the middle section where one bow must play two lines of counterpoint in 2-against-3 rhythms!

For his rollicking finale Sibelius pulls out all the double, triple and quadruple stops, alternating two main tunes in a virtuosic *tour de force*. The movement opens with a lively, tarantella-like dance (in 3/4 time rather than 6/8), followed by a heavy-footed polonaise. Although Sibelius referred to the movement as a *danse macabre*, it was Sir Donald Francis Tovey who provided the most-quoted characterization when he called it a “polonaise for polar bears.” Some mistake this as an insult, but in context Tovey simply provided a humorous, alliterative allusion to Sibelius's Nordic heritage while praising his handiwork. (Otherwise someone surely would have pointed out that polar bears are not indigenous to Finland!)

### **Sergei Prokofiev**

Ukrainian-Soviet composer, pianist and conductor

Born: 1891, Sontsovka (now Krasne), Ukraine; died, 1953, Moscow, USSR

### **Symphony No. 5 in B-flat Major, op. 100**

Composed in 1944

Premiered on January 13, 1945, at the Moscow Conservatory, conducted by the composer

Last J-Sym performance:

ca. 44 minutes (13', 9', 13', 9')

*I was returning to the symphonic form after a break of sixteen years. The Fifth Symphony is the culmination of an entire period in my work. I conceived it as a symphony on the greatness of the human soul. — Sergei Prokofiev*

Prokofiev was at the height of his creative powers and popularity when he composed his Fifth Symphony in 1944. He had returned to his Motherland in 1936, following an 18-year sojourn in the West after the Russian Revolution. It seems incredible that anyone would have departed Paris to set up housekeeping in Moscow during Stalin's Reign of Terror, but the Great Depression had pared the homesick composer's income and quashed prospects for new productions of his ballets and operas. Prokofiev already had made extended visits to the USSR to concertize, teach, and collaborate on commissions, and Soviet officials had proffered ingratiating invitations encouraging his return. Imagining himself immune from politics and with complete faith in his talent, Prokofiev headed “home.”

The intervening years before the premiere of the Fifth Symphony on January 13, 1945, had been very productive. Even after Hitler's 1941 invasion had edged World War II within twenty miles of Moscow, Prokofiev composed relatively unabated. He moved among various safe havens set up by the Soviet Composers' Union; during a summer's month in 1944 the short score of his new symphony emerged in the last of these. By autumn he was safely back in Moscow, and finished the orchestration in November.

When Prokofiev mounted the podium for the first performance he was greeted like a conquering hero. Only two weeks prior had seen the successful premieres of his Piano Sonata No. 8 and *Ivan the Terrible, Part 1*. As the 53-year-old composer raised his baton and the ovation faded, everyone suddenly could hear booming artillery celebrating the Soviet Army's advance into Germany. Pianist Sviatoslav Richter recalled, "He waited, and began only after the cannons had stopped. There was something very significant in this – something symbolic."

The symphony's first movement unfolds as a straight-forward sonata form, with an expansive principal subject transitioning into the sweeping second theme. The dominant motif in the closing section is a quick flourish followed by rapidly repeated notes; similar motifs provide a unifying element among the movements. Like Brahms in his Fourth Symphony, Prokofiev restates the opening in the home key as the development begins, but, like Tchaikovsky, lets full-bodied melodies rather than motivic fragments dominate the discourse. Brasses herald the recapitulation, and the coda becomes a victory celebration, complete with thunderous percussion imitating cannon-fire – recalling those salvos from before the performance.

For the galloping second movement Prokofiev salvaged music from his original "happy ending" version of *Romeo and Juliet* (Nos. 53-54 in Simon Morrison's restoration of Prokofiev's original score).

The slow movement presents a waltz-like theme Prokofiev drew from his score to an unrealized film of Pushkin's *Queen of Spades*. Signaled by piano reiterating a percussive rhythmic figure, the middle section includes a funereal cortège that becomes martial and menacing, after which the reprise of the waltz soothes like a lullaby. An "icy" coda closes the movement, the polar opposite of Wagner's *Magic Fire Music*.

Prokofiev's finale is a playful rondo. It begins with a calm introduction recalling the main tune from the first movement, and ends with a frantic coda that plunges headlong, driven by manic clockwork to a final big bang.

The symphony earned Prokofiev a Stalin Prize and got him onto the cover of *TIME* magazine following the Boston premiere that November. Sadly, he never conducted again after his triumphant Moscow performance. Shortly thereafter Prokofiev suffered a concussion (or stroke?) from which he never fully recovered. Slowed, yes – but with over two dozen works yet to come.

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