

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

**JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®**

School of Music

*presents*

***Fire and Ice***

**Symphony Orchestra**

**Foster Beyers, *conductor***

Thursday, November 30, 2023

8 pm

Concert Hall





## Program

Symphony No. 6, Op. 104

Jean Sibelius  
(1865-1957)

- I. Allegro molto moderato
- II. Allegretto moderato
- III. Poco vivace
- IV. Allegro molto

Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky  
(1840-1893)

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## Program Notes

### Symphony No. 6, Op. 104– Jean Sibelius

*“Whereas most other modern composers are engaged in manufacturing cocktails of various hues, I offer the public only pure spring water.” – Jean Sibelius*

Finnish composer Jean Sibelius is a national hero in his home country. His compositional career paralleled the national awakening of Finnish culture and language that was occurring in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when Finland was still a Grand Duchy of Russia. The music of Sibelius, inspired by the runic folk singing of the north and the folk poetry of Norse mythology like the Kalevala, was the first to express the landscape and culture of the Finnish people. His early nationalistic works such as Finlandia and his café music like Valse Triste gave Sibelius wide recognition and fame but it is his symphonic works that are central to his compositional goals.

Over the course of approximately thirty years, Sibelius developed his symphonic voice through seven symphonies. Initially the composer was heavily influenced by Russian predecessors such as Borodin and Tchaikovsky and this shows in the extroverted romanticism of his first two symphonies. In the Third Symphony Sibelius begins to seek a more unique, paired down classical approach. In 1907 the composer experienced a personal crisis when he was diagnosed with throat cancer. This brush with death resulted in the Fourth Symphony, a work which is quite different than its predecessors, stark and dissonant. His recovery resulted in a wellspring of compositional activity over the next 15 years that would result in his final three symphonies, numbers 5, 6 and 7. These works were all conceived and composed simultaneously. In his sketches the composer would juggle themes across all three symphonies. With great difficulty he arranged these themes into the three separate symphonies we know today. The Fifth Symphony, premiered in 1915 on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, did not satisfy him so he spent the next four years revising the work until he reached the version we know today. The completion of the Sixth Symphony followed four years later in 1923 and the work was premiered by the Helsinki Philharmonic with the composer conducting. With today’s performance, we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this work.

*“The wild and impassioned character in the sixth symphony is something completely vital, but is carried by undercurrents deep below the surface of the music.” – Jean Sibelius*

On the surface, the four movements of the Sixth Symphony seem to be fulfilling more traditional expectations than its predecessor, the three-movement Fifth, or its successor, the single-movement Seventh. The Sixth however speaks with a very personal voice through its impressionistic landscape painting and unusual forms. Sibelius uses neither the major or minor mode to center the tonality of this symphony but rather the Dorian mode, a scale rooted in the renaissance polyphony of composers like Palestrina and Tallis whom Sibelius became fascinated with around this time. The freedom of this musical syntax allows Sibelius to portray the vast evergreen forests and wintry landscapes of the Finish countryside. Nature, always an inspiration for this composer, is the focus of this symphony.

## Program Notes - *continued*

*"The Sixth Symphony always reminds me of the scent of first snow."* – Jean Sibelius

### **Mvmt. I**

This movement begins with a sweet purity. The divided violins offer a chorale that introduces the four-note falling motive which will permeate the entire symphony. As woodwinds and brass gradually enter the music rises to a pungent dissonance from which a C major chord is left hanging in the air. This provides the introduction for a spinning central section that rises to an ecstatic climax. Near the end of the movement the C major chord re-appears, building to a seemingly triumphant conclusion but after its release we are left with a much more hesitant ending.

### **Mvmt. II**

The opening quartet of bassoons and flutes seems to signal a slow movement in two beats per measure but soon we learn that this movement is more of a melancholy waltz in three beats. The audience's perception of tempo and rhythm are regularly undermined by the swirling upward scales. The final section of shimmering strings and chirping woodwind pairs, coming seemingly out of nowhere, could be portray the sights and sounds from deep in the forest. Another strange melancholic passage closes this movement.

### **Mvmt. III**

This very brief movement is permeated by a rhythm which sounds very much like a train rolling over the tracks. The rhythm is colored by a shifting landscape of woodwinds and strings while the flutes play a melody later heard in canon with the harp. This movement is the only one of the four to end with a strong statement of closure.

### **Mvmt. IV**

The movement opens with a dialogue, a game of opposites. High vs. low, Light vs. dark, perhaps even youth vs. experience. A brief moment of levity quickly descends back into darker undercurrents as a brusque motive is passed around the strings. Brief moments of light permeate but the frustration grows and builds until a massive unison B natural is presented monolithically by the entire orchestra. A cry of despair in the violins gives way to a brief but passionate passage that quickly loses steam and halts altogether. The opening motive returns, quieter now, leading us to a fleet Allegro section where the music gains in confidence, eventually overwhelming the dark undercurrents heard in the cellos and basses. Finally, a sweet string chorale is presented, rising to a climax before dying away to a wispy, deeply ambivalent ending.

- Program note by Foster Beyers

## Program Notes - *continued*

### Romeo and Juliet Overture-Fantasy – Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Like Berlioz, Verdi and Mendelssohn before him, Tchaikovsky took great inspiration from Shakespeare. He wrote three orchestral works based on the plays of the bard; the Tempest, Hamlet Overture-Fantasy and the first and best known of the three, Romeo and Juliet. The composer had already written his first symphony when his older colleague and mentor Mily Balakirev suggested he compose a work on the subject of Shakespeare's iconic romantic tragedy. A first version premiered in 1870 after much tinkering at the suggestion of Balakirev. The premiere did not go well and Tchaikovsky undertook significant revisions that led to a version of the work premiered two years later. That iteration bears a great resemblance to the one we now know. After another decade, Tchaikovsky revised further, adding an ending which provides a better sense of closure. This final version is the one which is normally performed, including at this evening's concert.

The Fantasy-Overture is not a literal re-telling of the Shakespeare play scene by scene. Rather, it captures the moods and emotions of the central characters. The work opens with a chorale melody describing Friar Laurence. Its orchestration for Clarinets and Bassoons is meant to imitate a small reed organ. Juliet daydreams of love before she is confronted with the reality of her family's politics. The Montagues and Capulets are heard in a dramatic B minor section that subsides for the first appearance of the love theme in Db Major first heard in a fragment by the Violas and English Horn and later in full played by the flute and oboe. Conflict returns as well as the anxiety of the new lovers. The famous love theme returns in the lush coloration of the full string section, this time a half step higher in the key of D. The theme fragments before being heard a final time, now a whole step higher yet again in order to symbolize their growing ardor. This version in E major is soon interrupted and overwhelmed by the warring families. The brass bring back the Friar Laurence theme but the assistance he gives is thwarted by a misunderstanding. The death of the young lovers is symbolized by a thunderous timpani roll. The epilogue suggests the lovers' ascension to heaven through a prayerful wind chorale. The entire orchestra punctuate the ending with a grandiose statement that brings this timeless tale to a close.

- Program note by Foster Beyers

# Symphony Orchestra Personnel

Foster Beyers, *conductor*  
Daniel Esperante, *DMA graduate assistant*

## Violin

Briana Clark  
Aiden Coleman  
Jonathan Colmenares  
Marley Fritz  
Madeleine Gabalski  
Alex Goodell  
Nathaniel Gordy  
Aiden Hall  
Addie King  
Zoe Lovelace  
Johnny Park  
Anthony Parone  
Jonathan Petrini  
Zike Qi  
Sierra Rickard  
Patrick Shaughnessy  
Rachel Tan\*

## Viola

Elliot Drew  
Katie Hayes  
Julia Johnson  
Micah Lee  
Ana Mooney  
Sunny Robertello  
Emma Thomas

## Cello

Chris Hall  
Julia King  
Vikram Lothe  
John Meshreky  
Danny Postlethwait  
Jessi Sfarnas

## Bass

Tina Battaglia  
Gabriella Bieberich  
Jack Choi  
Michael Dean  
John Foley  
Ruben Garcia  
James Adkison-Piccirello  
Frankie Sellars

## Flute

Daniel Esperante  
Jakob Knick  
Joshua Lockhart

## Oboe

Will Slopnick  
Andrew Welling

## Clarinet

Geneva Maldonado  
Gregorio Paone

## Bass Clarinet

Ian Graff

## Bassoon

David Kang  
Tony Russo

## Horn

Evan Hendershot  
Michael Parlier  
Gray Smiley  
Benjamin Wagner

## Trumpet

Logan Hayungs  
Max Parrish  
Theo Young

## Trombone

Nikhil Argade  
William Commins  
Andrew Ribo

## Tuba

Logan Davis

## Timpani & Percussion

Blaze Benavides  
Grayson Creekmore  
Shelby Shelton

\**Concertmaster*

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- In the United States, there are systems of power that grant privilege and access unequally such that inequity and injustice result. We resolve to educate ourselves, keep vigilant watch, and act to bring an end to systemic oppression.
- Cultural equity—which embodies values, practices, and policies that ensure all people have access to, and are represented in, the arts—is critical to the sustained engagement of music in society.
- Acknowledging and challenging our inequities and working in partnership is how we will make change happen.
- Everyone deserves equal access to a full, vibrant creative life, which is essential to a healthy and democratic society.
- The prominent presence of musicians in society can challenge inequities and encourage alternatives.



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