

Chapel Hill

Philharmonia

3 p.m. Sunday
October 21, 2018
Mooser Auditorium

Hill Hall
UNC-Chapel Hill

Music Director
Donald L. Oehler

Young People's Concert:
The Great Northern Forest

The Star-Spangled Banner
by John Stafford Smith, lyrics by Francis Scott Key

Peter and the Wolf, Op. 67
by Sergei Prokofiev
Narrator – Timothy W. Sparks

Finlandia, Op. 26
by Jean Sibelius

March from Karelia Suite, Op. 11
by Jean Sibelius

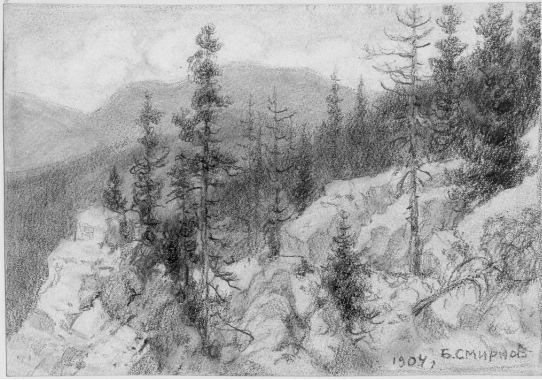


ORANGE COUNTY ARTS
COMMISSION

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Orange County Arts Commission.

The Great Northern Forest

Those who like great big words name it “the circumpolar boreal biome.” Russians call it simply Taiga – the vast expanse of evergreen forest, wetlands and lakes that covers their country’s



Taiga forest in Russia’s Ural Mountains drawn by Boris Smirnov, 1904

high northern latitudes. From the shores of the Pacific Ocean and Siberia in the far east, across eleven time zones, to the Republic of Karelia and the border with Finland in the west, the Great Northern Forest spans over 5,700 miles in Russia alone. Yet the Taiga knows no national boundaries. In Europe it covers the Baltic countries and most of Finland and Sweden. In North America it stretches across the full width of Canada and Alaska, in some places extending down into the continental United States. Writes Juha Aromaa of Greenpeace Nordic, “If you could look at the planet from above, it is the green crown circling the Arctic, the enormous green belt that keeps the earth breathing.”

Small wonder that composers who know the world’s great forests have sought to capture their essence in music. Today’s Young People’s Concert of the Chapel Hill Philharmonia features two beloved works with the forest at their core, “Peter and the Wolf” and “Finlandia.”

The Star-Spangled Banner

The concert opens with the United States national anthem, a song officially adopted as an expression of American identity. We will see that our anthem might be called “repurposed music.” Its tune originated with John Stafford Smith, an English songwriter. Around 1775 he wrote “To Anacreon in Heaven,” after an ancient Greek poet who loved wine. Even after America won its Revolution, this “Anacreonic Song” remained a popular hit in drinking establishments of both Britain and the United States.

American-British hostility rekindled in the War of 1812. Invading troops set fire to the White House and Capitol building. Meanwhile, the British Royal Navy sought to capture the seaport of Baltimore, Maryland. On September 13, 1814 Francis Scott Key, an American attorney, watched from a boat anchored in the city’s harbor as British warships shelled Fort McHenry. Despite the fierce bombardment and a pelting rainstorm, a flag bearing 15 stars and bars flew gallantly through the “perilous night.” At sunrise, “by the dawn’s early light,” Key watched the undaunted American soldiers raise a gigantic new flag over the still uncaptured fort. In celebration of this crucial victory that preserved our independence, he wrote new lyrics for Stafford Smith’s tune, morphing it into a patriotic ballade. Yet it was only decades later during the Civil War that “The Star-Spangled Banner” acquired deeper meaning, as the Union flag came to symbolize an indivisible nation. Still, another 50 years passed until in 1916, more than a century after the Battle of Baltimore, President Woodrow Wilson issued an executive order naming the song the national anthem of the United States. In 1931 Congress officially ratified his declaration.

Peter and the Wolf

In a fairy tale, danger often lurks in the woods. Imagine a child going out to play in a lovely open field beyond the fence enclosing Grandfather's farmyard. Let's say it's a boy named Peter. In Chapel Hill today he might be a Boy Scout. In Soviet Russia in the mid-1930s he would have been a Young Pioneer. Or, if you prefer, why not imagine a girl named Valerie or, aptly, Meadow?

Peter neglects to close the barnyard gate. Eager to swim in a pond, a duck waddles out to the field. A wild bird, Peter's friend, teases the duck about not being able to fly. This provokes a retort that any self-respecting avian creature should be able to swim. As the argument heats up and it seems feathers will fly, a cat sneaks through the long grass, hoping to munch the bird for lunch. In the nick of time, Peter spots the danger. He alerts the bird who wings up into the branches of a tree at the edge of the great forest surrounding the field.

Grandfather spies the open gate. He galumphs out to Peter and pulls him back to the house. The peaceful looking meadow, he warns sternly, "is a dangerous place. If a wolf should come out of the forest, then what would you do?" Of course, a massive gray wolf indeed emerges from the shadow of the trees. What happens next and whether Peter (or Valerie or Meadow) manages to save the day we will leave for Narrator Tim Sparks to relate.

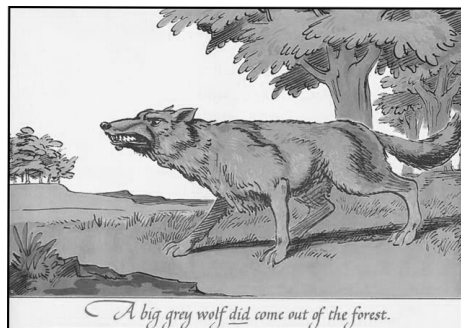


Illustration by Warren Chappell for "Peter and the Wolf," A. Knopf (1940)

Sergei Prokofiev, the creator of "Peter and the Wolf," grew up in a rural corner of what is now eastern Ukraine. He undoubtedly wove elements of his own childhood into that of his fictional young hero, although, unlike Peter, he was raised mainly by his devoted mother, not a curmudgeonly grandparent. Prokofiev's musical talent emerged early and from age thirteen he spent ten years studying piano and composition at the Moscow Conservatory of Music. He behaved as an "enfant terrible," openly criticizing his teachers and fellow students, and was eager to lead the cutting edge of ultra-modern music. He escaped from Russia after the Red Revolution of 1917 and established himself as a performer and composer in the United States and France. However, he was overshadowed as a revolutionary musical force by another Russian émigré, the brilliant Igor Stravinsky.

Russia's leaders wanted Prokofiev to return to his homeland to help showcase the young Soviet society's artistic achievements. Despite warning signs of impending crackdowns on freedom of expression, money and flattery combined to woo him back. He settled permanently in Moscow in 1936 and quickly produced some of his most successful works, including "Peter and the Wolf."

It took Prokofiev a mere two weeks to complete words and music for his "symphonic fairy tale for children." He created it for the Moscow Children's Musical Theater, where he liked to take his two young sons. The piece was an exercise in musical education. Prokofiev used specific musical instruments to portray the characters of his story, helping children recognize the instruments' unique sounds and the feelings they can convey. The pairings of the characters in "Peter and the Wolf" with the members of the orchestra still influence how many audience members and even professional musicians relate to the instruments: the flighty bird - flute; the

quacking duck – oboe; the sly cat – clarinet; grumpy Grandfather – bassoon; the dangerous wolf – three French horns; the shooting hunters – booming bass drum and timpani (kettledrums); the bright-eyed boy or girl, growing in courage, independence, and understanding – string choir of violins, violas, cellos and basses.

Natalya Sats, the Musical Theater's stage director, had a further educational motive. She saw "Peter and the Wolf" as a parable of how the brave, right-thinking youth, representing the new Soviet ideology, would outpace the stodgy Grandfather, symbolizing the failed old tsarist government. Thus, the show would teach children that the new regime must triumph over its wolfish enemies. Yet the wolf could be taken, instead, to stand for the paranoid leaders who brutally erased all perceived threats. Joseph Stalin and his henchmen often turned on their society's most creative intellectuals and artists, like the politically naïve Prokofiev, enforcing obedience to their narrow views and the all-powerful state authority.



Sergei Prokofiev and Natalya Sats
First readthrough from piano score of
"Peter and the Wolf" at Moscow Children's Musical Theater (1936)

Finlandia



Jean Sibelius
sketched by Albert
Engström (1904)

Jean Sibelius, born in 1865, grew up in Hämeenlinna, a town 60 miles north of Finland's capital Helsinki, surrounded by beautiful forests. Jean was only a toddler when his father died. He was raised by his mother and grandmother. At age ten an uncle gave him a violin. Jean became an accomplished player, but he started too late and lacked the advanced training needed to become a true virtuoso. In his early twenties at the Helsinki Music Institute (now renamed in his honor), Sibelius began his first formal lessons in music composition. He moved on to Berlin and Vienna to study with some of Europe's leading composers.

Upon his return to Finland, like many of his compatriots, Sibelius was caught up in the movement to gain independence from Russia, which had controlled his homeland since 1809. In the summer of 1892, he honeymooned with his new wife Aino in Karelia, an extensive Taiga-covered region straddling the Finnish-Russian border. The trip stoked Sibelius's nationalist ardor and rekindled a passion for the outdoors he had developed as a child. Even today, Lonely Planet's [Finland](#) guidebook declares about Karelia, "If you're looking for wilderness, powerful

history and the Finnish soul, your search starts here. Densely forested and gloriously remote, this is paradise for nature lovers. Bears and wolves roam freely across the Russian frontier..."

Sibelius drew musical inspiration from Karelia's history, its native people, and its majestic beauty. These influenced his first mature symphonic composition, "Kullervo," based on a great epic poem drawn from Finland's folklore. Even more directly, Sibelius wrote incidental music for a historical

pageant organized in 1893 by university students from Viipuri (Vyborg), one of Karelia's few major towns, that served as a weakly disguised demonstration against Russian hegemony. Sibelius published three of the musical vignettes as the "Karelia Suite." This piece laid the groundwork for a series of nationalist efforts culminating in 1899 with "Finlandia," perhaps the greatest example of composed music that defines the identity of its home country.

Sibelius's signature work derived from another protest against Russia's heavy-handed domination. When the staff of a Helsinki newspaper was suspended for editorials criticizing tsarist Russian rule, Sibelius responded with the "Press Celebration Music," a set of eight musical tableaux celebrating episodes from his country's history. The final tableau, "Finland Awakens," standing on its own, became extraordinarily famous as "Finlandia." It combines Sibelius's portrait of his country's magnificent forests, patriotic fervor, and an unforgettable hymn-like concluding tune. Paired with a text celebrating Finland's independence from the Russian "bear" in 1917, that tune now serves as the country's unofficial second national anthem. Other words have been set to this music, some prayerful, some calling for world peace. Today we invite you to join in singing newly written lyrics in honor of the Great Northern Forest.

March from Karelia Suite

Our program concludes with "Alla Marcia," the final movement from Sibelius's "Karelia Suite," a call to battle. It depicts a long-ago historical event well chosen to arouse Finnish patriotic fire – the liberation of Käkisalme (Kexholm) Castle from Russian conquerors in 1580. We invite young members of our audience to join Maestro Oehler on the podium to conduct this stirring march.

Program Notes by Mark Furth, PhD ©2018

Performers



Today's Narrator for "Peter and the Wolf," **Timothy W. Sparks**, tenor, enjoys a versatile performing career that includes opera, oratorio, concert work, and cabaret, with appearances in Europe and throughout the United States. Given a strong commitment to contemporary music, he has participated in the premiere of several new stage works by noted American composers. In January 2011 his recording of the Arnold Schönberg chamber orchestra transcription of Mahler's "Das Lied von der Erde" was released by Centaur Records, Inc. Mr. Sparks currently serves as a Lecturer in Voice and Diction at UNC-Chapel Hill and is an active adjudicator. Each summer Mr. Sparks teaches and performs for the International Young Artists Project based in

Monte San Savino, Italy. As a member of N.A.T.S., Inc., he served on the executive board for both the NC district and the Mid-Atlantic region, and is a member of Pi Kappa Lambda. Mr. Sparks received his BM in Vocal Performance from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and MM with the Performer's Certificate in Voice from the Eastman School of Music.

Music Director **Donald L. Oehler**, is Professor of Music, UNC-Chapel Hill. Mr. Oehler is a clarinetist who has drawn high praise as a soloist, chamber musician, conductor and educator over his long career at UNC. His performing activities have taken him throughout the United States,

The Northern Forest

Lyrics for "Finlandia" (music of Jean Sibelius) by Mark Furth ©2018

Around our Earth there grows the Northern Forest
A great green crown of larches, spruce and pine
The home to reindeer, bison, wolves and tigers
Where beavers build and birds soar in sunshine
Circling the globe, it spans across all borders
Connecting strangers' lands with yours and mine

The Taiga's trees protect our living planet
Cleansing our air in nature's grand design
But when we cut them down for wood and paper
We scar the beauty of our earthly shrine
Only if we preserve the Northern Forest
Our children's world will thrive like yours and mine



Central America, Canada, Great Britain, Eastern and Western Europe, the Middle East and Asia. He trained at the Juilliard School and began his career as principal clarinetist of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Teheran in Iran before moving to North Carolina to join the UNC music faculty. Mr. Oehler has been a conductor of professional ensembles, high school bands and youth orchestras, and is now in his 26th season as musical director of the Chapel Hill Philharmonia. A committed teacher and performer of chamber music, Mr. Oehler also is founder and director of the University Chamber Players, past director of the University New Music Ensemble and founder and member of the Qu'Appelle Winds, a Canadian-American wind octet. He founded and directs Chapel Hill Chamber Music and the Chapel Hill Chamber Music Workshop.