



# Program Notes for kids

**Mendelssohn “Italian”**  
**Saturday, November 7, 2015**  
**8:00 p.m.**  
**Michigan Theater**

**Sibelius** Karelia Suite  
**Prokofiev** Piano Concerto No. 3 in C major

*Intermission*

**Sibelius** Valse Triste  
**Mendelssohn** Symphony No. 4 in A major, “Italian”



Olavinlinna Castle, Karelia, Finland

# Karelia Suite

by Jean Sibelius

## What kind of piece is this?

The full version of *Karelia* is *Incidental Music*: music to accompany a play. This *suite* is three movements pulled from the full version and meant to be played on its own.

## When was it written?

Both the full version of *Karelia* and this *Suite* were composed in 1893.

## What is it about?

Karelia is the name of a region in the Southeast corner of Finland. The land of the Karelian people is now divided between Finland and Russia. Sibelius was involved with a political movement that tried to keep all of Karelia in Finland.

This music was meant to capture the character of Finnish folk music. Sibelius traveled to Karelia and wrote down the folk tunes he heard there. In this piece, he made the music sound like folk tunes without quoting them exactly.

# Valse Triste

by Jean Sibelius

## What kind of piece is this?

This piece was also originally *Incidental Music*. Sibelius composed it in 1903 for a play called *Death*, written by his brother-in-law.

## What is it about?

The story in the play that this music accompanied was about a man who sits at the bedside of his sick mother. When he falls asleep, he has dreams of her dancing with ghosts. At the end of the piece, Death knocks at the door and the music dies away. When you get home tonight, watch filmmaker Bruno Bozzetto's idea of what *Valse Triste* is about. His 1976 animated film, *Allegro non Troppo* imagines a ghost of a cat roaming an abandoned house: <https://youtu.be/kSuEhY0pjWA>

## Listen for...

The second movement of the *Karelia Suite* is a ballad, or slow song, played by the English Horn, which is a big version of the oboe. The English Horn is meant to portray a 15th-century Swedish King who is reminiscing in his castle while being entertained by a minstrel.

### Fun Facts

The Finnish \$100 bill had Sibelius's picture on it until it was replaced by the Euro in 2002.

This year marks the 150th anniversary - or *sesqui-centennial* - of Sibelius's birth. Special concerts are being performed all over the world to celebrate the composer this year.

## About the Composer

**Jean Sibelius** | Born December 8, 1865 in Hameenlinna, Finland | Died September 20, 1957 in Jarvenpaa, Finland

### Family & Career

Sibelius is one of the most well-known Finnish composers of classical music. He wrote nationalistic music that reflects the culture and landscape of Finland. He played piano and violin as a child and started composing when he was a teenager. Sibelius traveled to Berlin and Vienna to study musical composition, and then returned home to Finland to start a family and focus on writing music. Sibelius stopped composing in his mid-fifties and barely even spoke about music for the remainder of his life.

### Music

Sibelius wrote seven symphonies. His most popular work is a piece for orchestra called *Finlandia*.

### Listen for...

The second movement is a *Theme and Variations*: It begins with a main melody, which is then changed in different ways for each of the following five *variations*. See if you can follow along!

The **theme** is played by the orchestra.

The piano comes in for **Variation 1**, which is slower and smoother.

**Variation 2** is at a galloping pace, with the trumpet playing the melody at first and the piano playing exciting runs up and down the keyboard.

**Variation 3** is kind of jazzy, with accents occurring where they normally don't.

**Variation 4** is slow, quiet and haunting.

**Variation 5** is fast and playful.

## Piano Concerto No. 3

by *Sergei Prokofiev*

### What kind of piece is this?

A *concerto* is a piece of music written for a solo instrument with an orchestra. In this case, the piano player is the soloist, so he sits at the front of the stage and plays the most important part. In a concerto, the soloist and orchestra can interact in different ways: the soloist could play alone, the orchestra could play alone, the orchestra could play something to support the soloist, or the soloist could join in like a member of the orchestra. Concertos usually have three *movements* or sections.

### When was it written?

Prokofiev started work on this *Concerto* in 1913, but did not finish it until 1921.

## About the Composer

**Sergei Prokofiev** | Born April 23, 1891 in Donetsk Oblast, Ukraine | Died March 5, 1953 in Moscow, Russia

### Family

### Fun Facts

Audience members at the premiere of Prokofiev's first two piano concertos did not like his "futuristic" music. One of them said, "The cats on the roof make better music!" The premier of the *Third Concerto* was much more successful.

Prokofiev was born into a musical family. His mother, Maria, was devoted to music and for two months of every year would travel to Moscow or St. Petersburg to study piano. Prokofiev's first composition at age 5 was an "Indian Gallop" for piano that his mother wrote down for him. He entered the St. Petersburg Conservatory as a high schooler, making him much younger than the other students. Prokofiev annoyed his classmates by keeping statistics on the errors they all made.

# Symphony No. 4 in A major, “Italian”

by Felix Mendelssohn

## What kind of piece is this?

A *Symphony* is a long piece of music containing three or four *movements*. These movements, or sections, each have their own characteristics. Some movements may be upbeat and lively, while others may be slower and more song-like. This *Symphony* has four movements and is about 30 minutes long.

## When was it written?

Mendelssohn was inspired on a trip to Italy in 1829-1831 to write a piece that reflected the culture and landscape of the country. He finished this *Symphony* in 1833.

## What is it about?

Mendelssohn loved his time in Italy. This work draws on some of the things he saw and heard while traveling the country. The second movement is about a religious procession in Naples. And the fourth movement borrows characteristics from two Italian dances: The Saltarello (a Roman dance) and the Tarantella (a dance from Naples.)

## About the Composer

**Felix Mendelssohn** | Born February 3, 1809 in Hamburg, Germany | Died November 4, 1847 in Leipzig, Germany

### Family & Career

Mendelssohn was a child prodigy. He began taking piano lessons at age 6 and gave his first public concert at age 9. Between the ages of 12 and 14, he wrote 12 string symphonies to be performed at his parents' parties. He published his first piece of music - a piano quartet - at age 13 and composed his first symphony when he was 15.

Felix was not the only musical genius in his family. His sister Fanny was equally talented. As she grew up and was forced to give up her dreams of becoming a professional musician because she was a woman, she continued to compose. Some of the music written under Felix's name was actually written by Fanny. In fact, the Queen of England once told Felix what her favorite piece of his was, and it turned out to be one of Fanny's!

### Listen for...

Mendelssohn wrote that this *Symphony*, and especially the fourth movement, was the happiest music he had ever written. What do you think makes it sound so happy?

Listen to how the fourth movement seems to dance until it collapses: near the end, the orchestra tapers off until it is just the violins, cellos and basses playing quietly. Then Mendelssohn brings it back to life with a big *crescendo* (increase in volume) to finish the piece.



Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn